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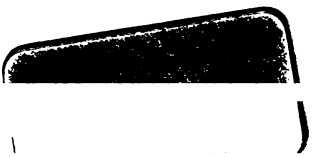

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MYDDLETON POMFRET.

A Novel.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1868.

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250. v. 135

LONDON:
PRINTED BY C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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Myddleton Pomfret.

BOOK III.

(CONTINUED.)

EVA BRACEBRIDGE.

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VIII.

A SLIGHT DISTURBANCE.

Eva was alone.

Her guardian had gone that day to Geneva, and had not yet returned.

She had been contemplating the splendid sunset, and had noted all the wonderful changes which the giant mountains had undergone, from rose to ghastly white; had gazed upon the wide glistening expanse of the lake, had admired the picturesque effect of the old round tower near the little port,

and then, satiated with these beauties, had taken up a book and seated herself in a fauteuil near the window. She had not been thus employed long, when she heard a footstep on the balcony, and the next moment the light and pretty figure of Tiffany appeared at the casement.

They had not met there before that day, and a cheerful greeting took place between them.

"Why are you standing there?" cried Eva, noticing that Tiffany did not enter. "Come in!"

"Not just now, darling. I want you to step out for a moment. I've something to tell you."

"Then you must contrive to tell it here," laughed the other. "I shan't go out till Mr. Pomfret returns."

"How silly you are!" cried Tiffany. "What are you afraid of? I tell you I've something particular to say to you."

"Well, what is it?" asked Eva, rising and approaching the window.

"I desire to be a peace-maker, dearest," rejoined Tiffany. "There is a person in this house who has offended you, and I have promised to intercede for him. He is deeply penitent, I can assure you, and will beg pardon on his bended knees, if allowed. May I tell him you forgive him?"

"On no account," replied Eva. "I did not suppose you would undertake such an errand. I cannot be mistaken as to whom you allude, since there is only one person in this house who has offended me. With him I will never exchange another word."

"Don't be very cross with me, darling," said Tiffany, coaxingly. "Captain Musgrave really is very sorry for what he has done. I couldn't resist his piteous entreaties—and so consented to bring him here."

"You have done very wrong!" cried Eva. "But I won't see him," she added, in a determined tone.

"Grant me only a moment, angelic girl!" cried Musgrave, springing forward. He had been standing on the balcony at a short distance, listening to what was said. "Let me try to exculpate myself."

"I won't listen to a word, sir," rejoined Eva, with a spirit that could scarcely have been expected from her. "By this inexcusable intrusion on my privacy you have added to your previous offences. I insist upon your immediate departure."

"I refuse to go till I have obtained your forgiveness!" he cried. "You cannot conceive how wretched I have been."

"Do be good natured, darling. Say you forgive him, and I will take him away at once!" cried Tiffany.

"Never!" rejoined Eva. "If you persist in remaining here, I shall ring the bell for assistance."

"Don't be foolish, dearest!" cried Tiffany. "Say a kind word, and he shall go."

Most opportunely the door opened at this juncture, and Sir Norman came in.

"Oh! you are just in time," cried Eva, springing towards him. "I claim your protection."

"Against this fellow?" demanded the young baronet, glancing fiercely at Musgrave, who, though greatly disconcerted, still stood his ground. "What is he doing here?"

"He has come to ask Miss Bracebridge's pardon—that's all," responded Tiffany.

"Then let him go at once," cried Sir Norman, in a menacing voice, "or I will throw him out of window." Stepping up to Captain Musgrave, he added, in a low determined voice, "Don't compel me to use violence before these ladies."

"Come away!" cried Tiffany, who was now greatly alarmed. "I've been the cause of all this."

"Before I go, will you hear my explanation, Sir Norman?" said Musgrave.

"Explanation is impossible. No gentleman would act thus. You are unworthy the name."

Musgrave's dark eyes flashed fire, and he raised his hand with the intent to strike Sir Norman, but the latter, who was a most powerful man, caught the uplifted arm, dragged him to the open casement, and thrust him forth.

IX.

A DUEL.

ABOUT an hour after the occurrence just related, Sir Norman was quietly reclining on a divan in the large and well-appointed smoking-room of the hotel, enjoying a cup of coffee and a cigar, when Hornby Flaxyard came in. As there chanced to be no one else in the smoking-room at the time, Hornby was able to enter upon his business without difficulty.

"You can guess my errand, Sir Norman," he said, after formally saluting the young baronet,

who rose at his approach. "I confess that it is not a very agreeable one to myself, but perhaps I may be able to arrange it."

"I don't see how, sir," rejoined Sir Norman, haughtily. "I conclude you are sent to me by Captain Musgrave. I expected a message from him. Let me say at once that I refuse to make any apology."

"I am sorry for it," said Hornby. "I hoped a little reflection——"

"Don't force me to make any remarks upon Captain Musgrave's conduct," interrupted Sir Norman, sternly. "I have treated him as he deserved."

"Since that's your opinion, Sir Norman, the difference can only be settled by an appeal to arms. Captain Musgrave, though grossly outraged, under the particular circumstances of the case would have been content with an apology,

but since you refuse him that amende, he will require another sort of satisfaction—and with the least possible delay. A meeting must take place between you and my friend to-morrow morning."

"Be it so, sir. Any hour and place will suit me—the sooner the better. To-night, if you wish it. Fortunately, I have a case of pistols with me."

"My principal is equally well provided. In regard to the place of rendezvous, we propose, if quite agreeable to you, to cross over into Savoy, where the ordinances are less strict in regard to duelling than here. A steamer to Evian leaves Ouchy at nine to-morrow morning. Will that be too early for you, Sir Norman?"

"Not a whit," he replied. "It will give me plenty of time for my accustomed swim in the lake, and I can breakfast on board the steamer, or at the Hôtel des Bains, at Evian, when this little affair has been adjusted. I shall ask Mr.

Pomfret to accompany me, and I don't think he will refuse. You may count upon me."

Hornby then bowed and left the room.

Having finished his cigar, Sir Norman was just going out in quest of Mr. Pomfret, when that gentleman entered the smoking-room. When informed of what had occurred, he was not at all inclined to allow Sir Norman to act as principal in the affair.

"This is my quarrel," he said. "I am the person affronted. It is for me to punish the offender—not you."

"Pardon me," rejoined the young baronet. "I have clearly the priority. If I fall, you can avenge me. Meet him I must, and shall. And I calculate upon your presence."

Pomfret made no further objection, and shortly afterwards they separated for the night.

Next morning, Captain Musgrave, who, ac-

cording to his own account, had passed an excellent night, and who seemed perfectly unconcerned, breakfasted at eight o'clock in the salle-à-manger with Hornby, and did ample justice to the delicious ferraz and the other good things set before him. Hornby was not half so cool, and not feeling quite up to the mark, was obliged to fortify his coffee with a teaspoonful of cognac.

Having finished breakfast, they went forth into the garden, taking with them a small bag, which contained a case of pistols.

As the steamer in which they intended to embark could now be descried about a mile off, coming up from Vevay, they lighted their cigars, and walked towards the landing-place. To watch them, and listen to their laughter—as Tiffany did from an upper window of the hotel—you would have thought they were bound on a pleasurable expedition.

Scarcely had they passed through the gates than Sir Norman and Pomfret came forth. The former carried a haversack, which answered the same purpose as his adversary's carpet-bag. Pomfret's countenance wore a stern and sombre expression, but the young baronet seemed perfectly easy and unconcerned. He had been up for more than a couple of hours, and had invigorated himself by a bath in the cold waters of the lake.

While crossing the gazon, Sir Norman cast a glance towards the room where the incident of the previous night had occurred, and he fancied he could discern a figure partially screened by the white muslin persiennes. By the time they had reached the place of embarkation the steamer had come up, and they immediately went on board. Captain Musgrave and his friend had posted themselves in the fore-part of the vessel, where they could smoke their cigars, so our friends went

aft, and sat down beneath the awning. There were a great many passengers on board—many of whom were coming from Italy—and a lot of luggage.

The steamer having little to do at Ouchy, was soon off again, and as it rapidly receded from the shore, a beautiful view was obtained of Lausanne, with its terraces and vine-covered slopes. Sir Norman's gaze was not directed towards this charming prospect, but to the casement we have just alluded to, in front of which Eva could now be clearly distinguished. It was a lovely and most enjoyable day. The Alps were entirely free from cloud, and the snowy peaks of the Dent de Jaman, the Dent du Midi, and the more distant Mont Velan, stood out sharp and clear.

The surface of the lake was smooth and bright as a mirror, and the deep blue waters, when

showering down the paddle-wheels, took most exquisite hues. On all sides the view was enchanting, and the noble Jura mountains, clothed to their summits with woods, and with their sides covered with vineyards, offered a charming contrast to the snow-crowned Alps. The only person, indeed, whose sombre looks did not harmonise with the scene, and upon whom the bright sunshine and clear atmosphere did not produce an exhilarating effect, was Myddleton Pomfret.

Never before had his features worn so stern an expression. He looked not around—neither towards the stupendous Alps, nor to the riant Jura mountains—but kept his eye fixed upon the blue waters through which the vessel was speeding, as if he would pierce their depths.

What were his thoughts? Was he thinking of another lake far away amid the bleak northern hills —a lake that could not compare in size, or beauty,

or grandeur, with this lovely inland sea, but which had charmed him in days gone by, when his heart was light? Was he thinking of the happy hours he had passed on that far-off lake with one now lost to him for ever? In the bitter disappointment caused by crushed hopes, did he now regret that when plunging into that lake, he had only simulated self-destruction? Did he feel half prompted to throw himself into the blue waters on which he now gazed, and so end his woes? We shall not examine his breast, but to judge by his looks, such might have been his thoughts.

The steamer was now half way across the lake, and the Savoy shore was beginning to display its beauties more fully. The picturesque little town of Evian, with its tall spire, its garden-terraces, its chesnut-groves, its vineyards, and its hotels near the landing-place, was now clearly distinguishable. In places the banks of the lake were

rocky and precipitous, and on the right could be seen a fine mediæval château amidst its woods. Sir Norman now thought it necessary to rouse his friend from the reverie into which he had fallen.

Shortly afterwards, Hornby Flaxyard came up, and after formally saluting them, led Pomfret to the stern of the vessel. Here they continued in earnest discourse till the steamer was within a short distance of Evian, when Hornby rejoined his principal.

In the conference which had just taken place, it was arranged that the selection of a spot adapted to the purpose required should be left to Hornby.

Accordingly, when the parties landed, Hornby and Musgrave at once marched off, and the others followed them. Instead of mounting the eminence on which Evian is built, they pursued a road on the banks of the lake, and ere long came to a footpath leading inland. Without hesitation they

took this path, which conducted them to a fine grove of chesnut-trees. Having passed through this grove they came upon the exact spot they sought—a secluded meadow watered by a clear mountain stream.

In another minute the parties had gained a retired part of the field close to the brook, and shaded by trees, and the seconds at once proceeded to make the needful preliminary arrangements. The pistols were produced, and after some little discussion it was agreed that those belonging to Sir Norman should be used. The ground was then carefully chosen, and the distance measured.

During these proceedings the principals had looked calmly on, but had scarcely made an observation. Captain Musgrave continued to smoke his cigar, and merely bowed his head in assent when his adversary's pistols were selected. Sir

Norman manifested equal composure. At last, the arrangements were completed.

Then, and not till then, did Musgrave fling away his cigar, and address himself seriously to the business in hand. Taking the pistol, which was delivered to him by Hornby, he placed himself as directed. His dark frock-coat, buttoned up to the throat, displayed his fine figure to advantage.

Like formalities had been observed on the other side, and the two antagonists stood face to face. Throughout, Sir Norman had maintained an undaunted demeanour, unmarked by the levity and affected nonchalance that characterised Musgrave's deportment. On receiving his pistol, he glanced significantly at Pomfret.

The seconds then retired. It had been arranged that the signal should be given by Hornby, and that the antagonists should fire when the handkerchief was dropped.

Never, perhaps, on a similar occasion were the feelings of a second more deeply interested on behalf of his principal than were those of Pomfret in regard to Sir Norman. Willingly would he have exchanged places with him. In expectation of the signal, Sir Norman had now drawn himself up to his full height, and his lofty figure and gallant bearing excited Pomfret's admiration.

The handkerchief fell, and both pistols were discharged.

At first, the lookers-on thought that neither was hit, but they presently discovered their mistake. For a moment Sir Norman maintained his erect position. Then dropping his pistol, he put his hand to his side, and fell heavily to the ground.

Almost as much pained as if he himself had been struck, Pomfret hurried with Hornby to the young baronet's assistance.

X.

AFTER THE DUEL.

Sir Norman Hylton, we are happy to state, was not dangerously hurt.

His adversary's bullet grazed his side, inflicting a painful wound, but fortunately did not touch a vital part. By the care of Myddleton Pomfret he was transported to the Hôtel des Bains at Evian, where, later on in the day, his wound was dressed by a skilful surgeon summoned by Pomfret from Lausanne, and in less than a week he had

sufficiently recovered to allow of his removal to the Beau-Rivage.

Naturally, the duel caused a vast deal of talk at the Beau-Rivage. None except those immediately concerned in it, who kept their own counsel, knew exactly how the affair originated, but everybody knew that Sir Norman had acted as Eva's champion, and by common consent agreed that she must reward him with her hand.

Much interest was felt for Sir Norman. Daily bulletins were brought from Evian by the captain of the steamer; and though these were always favourable, and showed rapid progress towards recovery, several persons crossed the lake to make inquiries at the Hôtel des Bains. Such was the curiosity excited by the affair, that a large party, under the conduct of Hornby Flaxyard, visited the scene of the encounter, and listened to that gallant young gentleman's description of the meeting.

Old Flaxyard, however, was anything but pleased by the part played by his son in the affair, and would fain have broken off all intimacy with Captain Musgrave, but such a course was no longer practicable. Wife, daughter, son were against him. They all liked Musgrave, and would not hear for a moment of giving him up. So the poor old gentleman yielded, though with a very bad grace. He grumbled incessantly, and often wished himself back at Cheapside and Clapham, vowing internally that he would never again bring his family to the Continent.

Though Musgrave had come off triumphantly, and though his conduct throughout the affair was unimpeachable, the circumstances that led to the meeting, so far as they were known, were not very creditable to him, and many of the company at the Beau-Rivage began to look shy upon him. Not knowing how to resent such treatment, he

thought it prudent to retreat. So he proposed a visit to Baden-Baden to the Flaxyards, and though the old gentleman was decidedly averse to the plan, he was overruled in the end, and the very next day the party started for that grand resort of gamblers and demireps.

Musgrave's departure was an immense relief both to Myddleton Pomfret and Eva. During the captain's stay at the Beau-Rivage, Eva had almost been kept a prisoner in her own apartments, and so obnoxious was he to Pomfret, that that gentleman would have quitted the hotel if anxiety for Sir Norman had not detained him. Till the young baronet was completely reinstated, Pomfret would not leave him. The kind-hearted fellow crossed over daily to Evian, accompanied by the surgeon from Lausanne, and ere a week had elapsed his care was rewarded, and he had the satisfaction of bringing back with him his friend.

Sir Norman's arrival by the steamer being expected, a crowd had collected at the landing-place to offer him a welcome, and congratulations on his recovery. A wounded man is sure to excite the sympathy of the gentler sex, and Sir Norman, feeble, pallid, and unable to walk without assistance, was far more interesting in the eyes of the young ladies than he had been when full of health and vigour.

Followed by the surgeon, and leaning on the arm of Myddleton Pomfret, he gratefully acknowledged the many kind inquiries addressed to him, and while doing so looked around—but looked in vain—for one whom he hoped might be there to greet him. Not perceiving her, he moved slowly on to the carriage which was waiting to convey him to the hotel.

His anxiety to behold Eva was not long ungratified. As soon as they alighted, Pomfret led

him to those pleasant rooms which we have already described. There he found her, and the meeting was far more agreeable than if it had taken place amid a throng of curious spectators.

Eva's reception of her champion was so cordial, so unlike her previous manner towards him, that Sir Norman persuaded himself that her heart was at length touched. Never before had she addressed him with so much warmth, never had she regarded him with so much interest. It was worth while to be wounded, he thought, to obtain such a compensation.

The interview was brief, for the surgeon, who was present, thought proper to abridge it, but it was in the highest degree satisfactory to Sir Norman. Pomfret also entertained the impression that a favourable change had been wrought in his lovely ward's sentiments towards the young baronet.

Both were wrong. Undoubtedly, Sir Norman's gallant conduct had raised him in Eva's estimation. He had risked his life in her behalf, had bled for her, and she could not be insensible to so much devotion. She felt profoundly grateful to him, but that was all. This she told him frankly at another interview, when, emboldened by her change of manner towards him, he ventured to renew his suit. The blow being unexpected, came upon him with the greater force. His distress was so evident that she could not help compassionating him. Yet she could not possibly excite hopes that could never be realised.

Pomfret, who had stepped out upon the verandah, in order to leave them alone together, now returned. A glance at the pair sufficed to show him how unsatisfactorily matters had been going on, and he looked reproachfully at Eva. She did not, however, stay to be questioned by him, but, making some slight excuse, hastily withdrew.

Seating himself on the sofa beside Sir Norman, Pomfret expressed his annoyance at the unexpected turn which the affair had taken, and earnestly besought his friend to desist from a pursuit which seemed certain to end in mortification and disappointment.

"It is plain I have failed," rejoined Sir Norman, sighing deeply. "And yet I do not see why I should have failed so signally. Without vanity, I may say that I have generally contrived to make myself agreeable to any girl whom I have particularly desired to please. But all my efforts to win Eva's love have proved ineffectual. I am just where I was when I began—a friend, but nothing more. There must be some one in the way. Tell me frankly, my dear fellow, has she an attachment?"

"I have no reason to suppose so. I have been constantly with her since her father's death—even before that sad event—and have never known any

one who has seemed to engage her affections. She has had many admirers, and has refused several advantageous offers made her at Madras."

"Still I adhere to my opinion. She may have formed an attachment, and have concealed it from you."

"Why should she do so? There can be no motive for concealment from me. I am not a flinty-hearted father, but a good-natured guardian, whose consent could be easily obtained, for I will not suppose for a moment that she would fix her regards on any person whom I could not approve. I have always encouraged her to consult me. If she had any secret attachment, I must have detected it."

"My dear fellow, you give yourself credit for far more penetration than you really possess. Take my word for it, your ward is in love. That is the reason why she is insensible to my suit. Think again. You say you are constantly with her.

Some one, I am convinced, has forestalled me. Who is it?"

As he put the question, he looked fixedly at Pomfret, but the latter bore the scrutiny unmoved.

"You tell me I am wanting in discernment," said Pomfret, with a half smile, "and very likely I am, for I have seen no one for whom Eva has shown a marked preference. However, whether you have a rival or not in her affections, it is clear that she does not appreciate you as she ought, and as I would have her do. Since I cannot force her inclinations, the only course left me is to take her away. I have stayed longer at this place than I intended, chiefly on your account."

"Don't let me drive you away," cried Sir Norman. "I promise you not to intrude further on Eva, or attempt to renew my hopeless suit. If I were able to travel, I would relieve you

from any uneasiness on my account by instant departure, but I must, of necessity, remain here a few days longer."

"I am anxious to be off," said Pomfret. "I have business in London which ought to be attended to, and which I have neglected. I hope we shall meet again at no distant date, and under happier circumstances. It is idle for me to say that I should have been delighted to give my ward to you, but since she is obstinate, and will have her own way, my little matrimonial project, which I am certain would have tended to her happiness, must fall to the ground. Don't be downcast, my dear fellow. After all, yours is a very mild case."

"A mild case! Few men, I fancy, could suffer more than I do now. What can be harder to bear than unrequited love? What more painful than to discover that another is in possession of the heart you seek to win?"

"You are wrong, Sir Norman. There is suffering far harder to bear than that which you are compelled to endure. What is unrequited love to the loss of one bound to you by sacred ties who has been snatched from your arms by a villain? Your suffering, I grant, may be sharp for the moment, but it will pass away, and leave no trace behind. But wrongs such as I have described for ever torture the heart, and stir the brain almost to madness."

He betrayed so much excitement, and spoke with such passion, that it was evident the case he described was his own.

Sir Norman looked at him earnestly, and said,

"I can conceive the misery of one who has been deeply injured, but at least he may have the satisfaction of revenge."

"Even that satisfaction may be denied him," cried Pomfret. "But let us not pursue the

subject further. Few men escape without some laceration of the heart, and he is happiest who has least sensibility."

"Do you mean to remain in London, may I ask?" inquired Sir Norman.

"My plans are uncertain. Much depends on Eva. I am perplexed how to act for the best in regard to her. A marriageable ward is as great a plague as a marriageable daughter."

"The easiest way of getting rid of the difficulty would be to marry her yourself," said Sir Norman, with a certain intention. "Pardon me, I did but jest," he added, startled by the effect produced by the suggestion. "I am excessively sorry that I have pained you."

"Your remark has pained me," said Pomfret, "but I am not sorry you have made it, because it affords me the opportunity of stating positively that I look upon Eva as a daughter. I have no

other feeling towards her. And she regards me in the light of a father. I need scarcely add, that I should never dream of marrying her. But if none of these obstacles existed, there is yet another, to which I will not refer, but which would be sufficient to prevent my union with her."

"Say no more, my dear fellow," cried Sir Norman. "I am sorry to have forced this explanation from you. The slight insight that you have given me into your history interests me deeply, but I will make no further inquiries about it. On one point only I should like to be satisfied, but do not answer me if you have any objection to do so. Is Captain Musgrave connected with the painful circumstances to which you have adverted?"

"He is the cause of all my misery," replied Pomfret, sternly. "And you would have done me a good turn if you had shot him."

"I meant to kill him, but his hour, I suppose, was not come, or the devil befriended him. But if he has wronged you, why do you not avenge yourself upon him?"

"My hand is tied," rejoined Pomfret. "Don't ask me why. I cannot explain. The time will come when I shall be able to settle accounts with him, and I will then pay him off in full."

"Don't put off the settlement too long," said Sir Norman. "But we have had enough of him. Let us turn to something else. I will now explain why I asked whether you are going to stay in town. You have often heard me speak of my old tumble-down house in Surrey?"

"Yes. Hylton Castle. I have seen it. It is just the sort of place that would suit me."

"That's lucky. I was about to offer it to you for two or three months, if you choose to occupy it. I shall probably remain upon the Continent

for some time. You will find two or three old servants there who will attend to you, but I cannot promise you first-rate accommodation. I think Eva might like the place, and I should wish her to see it, though I shan't be there to welcome her."

"Will you let me the house as it stands till Christmas? If so, I'll take it on your own terms."

"I would far rather lend it you, but since you won't be under an obligation to me, I agree to your proposal. I'll let it you till Christmas. But before deciding, had you not better consult Eva? She mayn't like the notion."

"We'll hear what she says," replied Pomfret.

With this he summoned the young lady, and acquainted her with the plan. She looked quite surprised, and asked Sir Norman if he was really serious.

"Serious! to be sure I am," he replied. "I

have agreed to let my house to Pomfret, and he may consider that I have conferred a great favour upon him, for I wouldn't let it to any one else. Don't fear any intrusion on my part. I shan't come near the place unless you choose to invite me, but as I have just told Pomfret, I think you will like the old house."

"Oh, I can't fail to like it. It's very kind in you to give us the opportunity of passing a few months in such a charming old place as Hylton Castle."

"I feel quite sure the park will please you, for it has great beauties—a fine grove of old chesnuts, and a magnificent double avenue of lime-trees—but you mustn't expect too much from the house. It's in a sad ruinous state."

"I don't mind that. I dare say some portion of it is habitable."

"A few rooms are in tolerable repair. But I ought to warn you that one of them is haunted."

"Delightful!" she exclaimed. "You couldn't have conferred a greater favour upon me. I shall now be able to indulge my romantic notions to the full. I have always longed to live in an old ruined castle."

"I must not allow you to deceive yourself. This is not exactly an old castle—merely an embattled mansion."

"Well, it's picturesque, I'm quite sure. And then there is a ghost—that's enchanting! Where is the haunted chamber?"

"I should spoil your pleasure if I were to give you any information on that point. I won't even tell you in what form the ghost appears."

"Have you ever seen the ghost yourself?"

"More than once; but I must positively decline to give you any particulars. I won't frighten you too much beforehand."

"You won't frighten me at all," she rejoined, gaily. "Of all things I should like to be the

heroine of a ghost story. Unfortunately, I am not at all superstitious, and, therefore, am unfitted for the part."

"Perhaps your incredulity may be shaken at Hylton Castle."

"We shall see. If I should have a mysterious adventure there, Mr. Pomfret shall send you an account of it."

"And you really think you can pass a few months in quiet seclusion in the country?" remarked Pomfret.

"Certainly I can," she replied.

"Oh, you will find plenty of society in the n eighbourhood, if you choose to cultivate it," said Sir Norman.

"Not on my account," said Eva. "I prefer seclusion. I don't care for town-life in the country. I don't want dinners, visitors, and balls. I can amuse myself very well in the garden—if there *is* a garden—and by roaming about the park."

"Just the sort of life I should like to lead!" said Sir Norman, gazing at her tenderly.

"But you never have led it, I suppose?" she rejoined. "You never have remained for six months at your old house, I will venture to say."

"Very true; but I *could* be perfectly content to remain there under certain circumstances."

With this he arose, bade adieu to Eva, and begging Pomfret to give him his arm, returned to his own room.

He did not see her again before she left the Beau-Rivage.

XI.

AN EXPLANATION.

In a few minutes Pomfret came back.

As he entered the room, Eva ran towards him, exclaiming, "Oh, I'm so charmed with this idea of the old house!"

"I'm glad you think the prospect of a secluded life agreeable. If you are tired of it, you can easily make a change by moving up to town. It will be a great satisfaction to me that you should be quietly settled during my absence."

"Your absence! What do you mean, sir?" she cried, quickly. "Surely you are not thinking of returning to India? If you have any such design, I beg you will let me know it. I won't be left behind. I now begin to suspect that this arrangement in regard to Hylton Castle is nothing more than a device to keep me quiet. But I won't be so taken in. If you return to Madras, I shall go with you."

"My dear child, that would be ridiculous, and I can't possibly allow it," returned Pomfret. "I shan't be away more than six months, and a considerable portion of that time will be occupied by the voyage out and the voyage back. If you don't like Hylton Castle, I will make other arrangements for you, but I can't consent to your return with me to Madras—unless you will promise to stay there."

"No, I won't give any such promise. You

know very well that I don't want to live in India. I prefer England. But I think you are treating me very unkindly in not allowing me to do as I like."

"Only a few moments ago you declared that nothing would please you so much as to have a few quiet months at Hylton Castle. Now you have suddenly changed your mind."

"But I didn't imagine I was to be left quite alone there."

"I don't mean that you should be left quite alone. I will take care you have an agreeable female companion."

"Some stupid old lady, I suppose. I would rather be alone than have such a companion."

"Well, you have relations. Invite some of them."

"I don't want to invite them. I have seen nothing of my relations. As you know, when I

left school I came out at once to India, so I had no time to become acquainted with any of them. They are quite strangers to me."

"Still it is only right and proper that you should keep up an intimacy with your own family. There is no reason for estrangement. On your arrival in London you must call upon them, and then you can select some one among them to whose charge I can commit you during my absence."

"I will do whatever you desire. But I should infinitely prefer going with you. You seem to care nothing for leaving me behind," she added, in a reproachful tone.

"You do me an injustice. I shall be very sorry to part with you. But it cannot be helped. I am obliged to return to Madras. I have many business matters to settle there. Indeed, I have your poor father's affairs to arrange."

"You are quite sure you will come back in six months?"

"It is my fixed intention to do so now, and unless I am prevented by unforeseen circumstances shall certainly return at that time."

"I shall be wretched while you are away. I was never so miserable as when you left me at Madras, and now you are going to abandon me again. I have been so much accustomed to be near you, that I cannot bear the thought of separation. A secluded life at Hylton Castle would have been delightful to me if you had been there; but left with people whom I care nothing about, I shall be dreadfully moped."

"This is mere childish fancy," said Pomfret, gravely. "Since I cannot always be with you, you must look to others to supply my place. I really think this separation will be serviceable to you, and prepare you for the part which, ere long,

you must play in life. Perhaps on my return I may find you married; or, at all events, engaged to be married. I promise my consent beforehand."

"You are very cruel to tease me so," she cried, the tears springing to her eyes. "You know very well that I shall not be married, or even engaged. If you wait till I ask your consent, you will have to wait a long time."

"You think so now, and mean what you say," he rejoined, with some bitterness; "but I have little faith in a woman's resolutions. However, you are perfectly at liberty to change your mind, and, indeed, I hope you will speedily change it. Now attend to me," he added, taking her hand. "I have a delicate question to put to you, but as your guardian I may be permitted to ask it. Sir Norman accounts for your indifference to him by the supposition that you are attached to another.

I told him that I was quite sure he was mistaken, but he adhered to his opinion."

As the words were uttered, Eva flushed deeply, and then became deathly pale.

"You display unwonted emotion, my dear child," he said, regarding her with tenderness. "I begin to think Sir Norman is right in his conjecture."

"He *is* right," she rejoined, casting down her eyes, and speaking in low tremulous tones, "and I am surprised you have not made the discovery before."

"I must, indeed, have been blind. But I had no suspicion of anything of the kind. How long have you had this attachment?"

"How long? Ever since——I cannot tell when it first began."

"Why did you keep it a secret from me? I have ever been anxious for your happiness, and I persuaded myself that I had your entire confidence."

"You have always had my confidence, except on this point," she replied, still without raising her eyes, "and I did not dare to disclose it to you."

"I look in vain for a motive for such constraint."

"The motive is not hard to find. But now that I have spoken," she cried, summoning up all her courage, and looking at him steadfastly, "shall I make a full confession to you?—shall I lay bare the secret of my heart?"

"No," he replied, hastily checking her. "No. I would rather not be the depository of such a secret. You say you had a motive for restraint. The motive must still exist. Do not allow yourself to be carried away by a sudden impulse—to make a disclosure which you may hereafter regret. Keep your secret. I can counsel you just as well without knowing more, and I would say to you, if you have fixed your affections on some one who is unworthy of your love——"

"Oh no! he is not unworthy of my love," she interrupted—"far from it. He is only indifferent to me."

"In that case you must conquer your passion. To nourish affection for one who is indifferent to you is a weakness of which I should not have deemed you capable, if you had not confessed to it. Whatever the effort may cost you, stifle the feeling. Summon feminine pride to your aid. You need not despair of a cure, if you are resolute."

"Have you found it easy to pluck out a passion that has taken deep root in your breast?" she cried. "I think not. Can you assure me that you are perfectly cured? Your looks convince me to the contrary. Yet you bid me do that which you cannot yourself perform."

"I advise you for your own happiness," he said, in a broken voice. "My case is not your case. I cannot obliterate the past. I cannot forget that

I have loved—ay, and been beloved in return; but I love no longer."

"Are you quite sure of that?" she demanded, sceptically.

"Quite sure," he replied. But there was something in his tone that contradicted the assertion. "Promise me you will follow my advice, and conquer this silly passion," he added.

"I will do my best. At all events, I promise that you shall hear no more of it. I regret that I have said so much."

"Nay, it is well that you have spoken," he said, regarding her with tender compassion. "When the heart is too full there must be an outlet. You will be all the easier for this partial disclosure. Whoever has unconsciously won your heart—and I do not desire to know his name—he deserves pity, for he has lost a priceless treasure. But enough has been said on the subject. This is

our last day at this lovely place. Do not let us waste it."

And he led her out.

For some time they stood upon the balcony, gazing on the magnificent scene in silence. During that interval calmer thoughts succeeded to the tempest that had just agitated either breast. At last Pomfret spoke:

"To-morrow we must bid adieu to this enchanting lake, and to those mighty mountains. Perhaps I may some day return hither, but if not, the beauties of the spot are not likely to be effaced from my recollection. I shall always be able to conjure up this glorious picture in my imagination."

"Since you like the place so much why not remain here?" said Eva.

"Because I am not destined to know repose," he rejoined. "I cannot remain inactive. Were I to do so, my thoughts would kill me. Much as I

love this place—much as I admire its beauties—I cannot stay here. I should tire of that lovely lake, of those stupendous mountains—of all about me—of myself most of all. I must mix with active life. I must forget myself in the turmoil of business. As I have said, the recollection of these scenes will cheer me and delight me, but I must quit them."

That evening Pomfret passed an hour or two alone with Sir Norman, during which they came to a perfectly satisfactory understanding as to the rent to be paid by the former for Hylton Castle.

Sir Norman gave Pomfret a letter which he had written to his bailiff, Mr. Beecroft, and another addressed to his housekeeper, Mrs. Austin, in which he informed them both that he had let his house, grounds, and park to Mr. Myddleton Pomfret till Christmas, and enjoined them to obey Mr. Pomfret's orders, and do all in their power to contribute to his comfort during that term.

Next day, Pomfret and his fair ward proceeded

to Geneva. Thence they travelled on to Paris, breaking the journey by a night's rest at the old capital of Burgundy. Three days—sadly too little, Eva thought—were devoted to Paris, and then they went on to London.

End of the Third Book.

BOOK IV.

THE FLAXYARDS.

I.

MR. BOOTLE BROOKE SHELMERDINE.

WHEN the Flaxyards arrived at Baden-Baden, a certain Mr. Bootle Brooke Shelmerdine was staying at the Hôtel de l'Europe, where they put up. A few words must be devoted to this young gentleman, who is destined to play a little part in our story.

Bootle Brooke Shelmerdine was the only son —the only child, in fact—of a Lancashire cotton-spinner. Fifty years ago, John Shelmerdine, Bootle's worthy sire, had been a factory lad in

Manchester, but he had now got a large mill of his own at Bury, with a noble mansion and grounds in the neighbourhood of that thriving but ugly town.

John Shelmerdine kept a large establishment, men-servants in livery, carriages and horses, and lived like a prince. Why should he not? He could well afford to do so, for though not exactly a millionnaire, he was rich, and had only one son. Many men who have risen from nothing, and have not had the advantage of a liberal education, are narrow-minded, and don't know how to spend their money, but John Shelmerdine was an instance to the contrary. In early life he had received little or no education, but he contrived to make up for his deficiencies to a certain extent as he went on, and he fortunately possessed good sound common sense, and remarkable judgment and acuteness. He saw clearly the road that

would lead to success, and steadily pursued it. Everything prospered with him. Before he was fifty he was a wealthy man, and had purchased a large estate on the road to Haslingden,' and erected the mansion called Belfield, to which we have just alluded.

In point of birth, Mrs. Shelmerdine was very superior to her husband, and rather looked down upon him. She belonged to the Bootles and Brookes of Cheshire, and had married plain John because he was rich, and could make a good settlement upon her. John Shelmerdine was very proud of his wife because she was a lady, and submitted humbly to all her whims and caprices; and he was also proud of his son, because he thought him a very fine gentleman, and because he resembled his mother.

Very lucky was Bootle in having some one to make a fortune for him, for we doubt if he would

have made one for himself. He had not a tithe of old John's natural ability, and was totally wanting in the judgment and discrimination that had conduced to his father's eminent success. Bootle had no taste for business of any kind. He did not care even to have a profession. He would not go into the church, though urged to do so by his father, nor into the army to please his mother. Law and medicine equally repelled him: the first was too dry and laborious, to the second he entertained a decided aversion. He was quite content to be a cotton-spinner, provided his father would look after the business, so he was taken into the concern, and allowed to do as he pleased.

He went to the counting-house now and then, talked to the book-keepers, who laughed at him in their sleeve, and after passing an hour or two in doing little more than reading the newspapers, or conducting some stranger over the mill, he rode

back to Belfield, or made some calls in the neighbourhood. But as Bury and Manchester—John Shelmerdine, being closely connected with the latter important city, was constantly there—offered no great attractions to Bootle, he passed a considerable portion of his time in town. Indeed, he might be said to live in London during the spring and early summer. He had three or four clubs to which he could resort for society. When the London season was over, he yachted; and when tired of yachting, he went to Scotland; when he had had enough of the moors, he went upon the Continent; and, returning towards winter, took up his quarters at Brighton, where he rode out with the harriers.

Thus it will be seen that he did not spend much of his time at Belfield, nor bestow much of his society upon his worthy father. He saw more of his mother in London in the spring, and at

Brighton in the winter, than he did at home in Lancashire. Bootle Brooke Shelmerdine had received the education of a gentleman, and had been at Eton and Oxford. But he had as little ambition as energy, and did not desire to distinguish himself. Anything that gave him trouble, bored him. He would not go into parliament, because attendance at the House was a bore; he would not join the volunteers, because rifle practice was a bore. So little capable was he of mental exertion, that he thought it a bore to write a letter. Yet he was not a bad fellow, and had few of the vices into which idle young fellows are apt to fall. He was not extravagant, and his demands on the paternal exchequer were never excessive. In personal appearance, Bootle differed as much from his father, who was short, stout, and hard-featured, as he did in character. Some people thought him good-looking, and he would

have been so but for the vacant expression of his features. His manner was languid and indifferent, and he spoke in a drawling, affected voice. He was rather tall than otherwise, and stooped slightly, as if it was too much trouble to hold himself erect, and sauntered rather than walked. With his blonde locks and fair complexion he looked exceedingly juvenile—almost boyish—the only evidence of his manhood being a slight silken moustache.

Within a very few weeks of his introduction to the reader, Bootle Shelmerdine had never for a moment entertained the idea of a wife. Marriage was a frightful bore, and he shuddered at the bare notion of it. He had seen plenty of pretty girls in town, at Brighton, and even at Manchester, but none of them had produced the slightest impression upon him.

It was reserved for Tiffany Flaxyard to con-

vince him that he was not so indifferent as he supposed to the attractions of the fair sex. He saw her on her arrival, and was at once taken by her—perhaps because she was so fast, and he himself was slow. There was something about her that struck his fancy. Gazing at her at the table d'hôte, and listening to her converse, he thought her an amazingly fine girl.

At the same time he became a little jealous of Captain Musgrave, who sat next her. He afterwards beheld her at a ball at the Conversations Haus, charmingly dressed, full of spirit and fun, waltzing and flirting with Musgrave. He grew more in love, and more jealous. His jealousy stirred him on, and roused him from his wonted listlessness. Thus Musgrave unintentionally aided Tiffany in her conquest. Quickly perceiving that she had found a new admirer, she put in play all her little artifices to lure him on. Bootle was

entangled in her meshes before he had even exchanged a word with her. For the first time in his life he took a little trouble. He introduced himself to Hornby, and very soon got introduced to Hornby's sister. Finding that the young man was really smitten, and having ascertained that he had very good expectations, Tiffany laid herself out to complete her conquest.

As Musgrave spent all his time at the gambling-tables, the field was left open to Bootle, who was now constantly with the Flaxyards, breakfasted with them, sat next his charmer at the table d'hôte, and accompanied her to Lichtenthal, Eberstein, and the Alte Schloss. During these excursions many favourable opportunities for a declaration occurred, and Tiffany was at all times quite prepared to give it due consideration. But Bootle, being a slow man, could not make up his mind. He seemed always on the point of pro-

posing, but never did propose. Tiffany, who did not like such "shilly-shally work," as she termed it, was determined to bring him to the point; and while they were at Eberstein, gazing at the beautiful valley of the Murg, and he was hesitating in his usual style, she quite disconcerted him by laughing in his face, and telling him plainly that she knew what he meant to say.

"No use in being bashful with me," she said. "If I didn't like you I'd tell you so in a moment. But I *do* like you—so there's an answer to the question which I know you're dying to ask me."

"Then I may consider myself——" stammered Bootle, whose confusion prevented him from going on.

"Consider yourself the happiest of men," supplied the young lady. "Speak to pa as soon as you please. Ah! here he is," she added, as the old gentleman came up, and broke out into rap-

tures about the picturesque beauties of the Murg-thal.

"Never mind the Murg-thal just now, pa," said Tiffany. "Your consent is wanted to make two young people happy. Be so good as to perform the part of an amiable parent at the close of a farce —join our hands, and give us your blessing."

"Bless my soul! what does the girl mean?" exclaimed Flaxyard, staring at Bootle. "Am I to understand——"

"How exceedingly dull you are, sir," said his daughter. "You are to understand that Bootle has proposed. But of course I couldn't say 'yes' without your consent."

"I haven't exactly made the proposal in due form, sir, but——"

"It comes to the same thing," said Tiffany. "All now rests with you, pa. What have you to say?"

"Why, that I give my consent with all my heart," he replied. "I won't say that the announcement has taken me by surprise, because I have noticed what has been going on—ha! ha! Since you have succeeded in gaining my daughter's affections," he added to Bootle, "you shall have her. I'm sure you'll make her happy, and, from my own experience, I can confidently affirm that there is no true happiness except in the married state."

"That's the correct thing to say on the occasion, but it's rather hackneyed," laughed Tiffany. "Tell Bootle you'll come down handsomely. That will be more to the purpose than a common-place observation on conjugal felicity."

"Well, so I will come down handsomely, my dear," replied her father. "I hope the arrangement will be as agreeable to your own family as it is to mine," he added to Bootle.

"I dare say it will," replied the young gentleman. "I suppose I must write and tell them about it. But it will be a confounded bore. I hate writing letters of any kind."

"I can't take this trouble off your hands, or I would," said Tiffany. "Stay! I have it. Send them a telegram. That will do as well."

"A brilliant idea, upon my soul!" exclaimed Bootle. "I should never have thought of it. By Jove! you're a wonderful girl."

"Yes, I flatter myself I am," she rejoined.

Brilliant as the plan appeared to Bootle, neither old Flaxyard nor his wife approved of it; but, in spite of their objections, it was acted upon. A telegraphic message was sent to Bury. It was necessarily brief, but to the purpose, and ran thus:

"*Engaged. Fine girl. Lots of tin. Handsome settlement expected.*"

To this came a prompt reply:

"Glad to hear it. Who is she? How much tin? No difficulty as to settlement."

So far as it went this was satisfactory, but further information being required, Bootle was obliged to send another message, and enter a little more into detail.

Old Flaxyard, who was delighted with the proposed match, undertook to give his daughter thirty thousand pounds, and this liberal offer being communicated to John Shelmerdine, he telegraphed the following decisive response:

"All right. Choice approved. Will make corresponding settlement. Love to the young lady."

Thus the preliminary arrangements of the in-

tended marriage of the slowest man going were settled with lightning-like rapidity. Had Bootle employed the post instead of the wires of the telegraph, he would have been a month about it. We recommend a like course to other contracting parties. Besides its expedition, the telegraph saves a world of discussion. In the present instance, we will almost venture to say that if long letters had passed between Bootle and his mother, the engagement would have been interrupted, if not broken off altogether.

Mrs. Shelmerdine did not at all like the choice made by her son. The very name of Flaxyard repelled her, though she admitted that Shelmerdine was not much better. And she was astonished that Bootle had not looked higher than a draper's daughter. The girl might have money, but in his case that was not half so important as a good connexion. With Bootle's expectations he might have

married into a titled family. She could easily have arranged such an alliance for him, and would have done so, if he had consulted her, but she had never supposed he would marry in such a hurry. Tiffany Flaxyard (was there ever such a dreadful name!) must be vulgar and underbred. How could Bootle, whose tastes were refined, be captivated by such a person? The thing was inconceivable. The girl must be artful, and no doubt the girl's mother was a designing woman. Poor Bootle! he had been nicely taken in.

In such terms as these she gave vent to her disappointment, and in such terms, though probably more at length, she would have written to her son —had time been allowed her. But the electric telegraph did the business before she could interfere. John Shelmerdine did not take the same view of the arrangement as his wife. He ascertained that Flaxyard was a highly respectable,

wealthy man, and saw no reason why Flaxyard's daughter should not suit Bootle. So he gave his consent, as we have seen, and this done, no more could be said. Mrs. Shelmerdine had to reconcile herself to the match as best she could.

To save himself the trouble of description, Bootle sent his mother a photograph of his intended, taken at Baden, and very like the original. On seeing it, Mrs. Shelmerdine almost screamed.

"What a pert, disagreeable-looking creature!" she cried. "I told you she must be underbred. Look at her and judge for yourself. There, sir —there's your precious daughter-in-law, and a nice creature she is!"

And she tossed the portrait to him.

"Well, I can't find any fault with her," said John. "She's a smart, saucy-looking lass, and looks as if she had plenty to say for herself."

"She has talked Bootle into making her an offer, that's what she has done. I will never believe he can admire such an impudent piece of goods as this."

"Why not?" cried John. "I'm sure the girl's uncommonly pretty."

"Mere vulgar beauty. One of your odious fast girls. Talks slang, I'll be bound. I shall never be able to endure her. She's not a lady, and Bootle ought to marry a lady."

"Well, my dear, I can't say whether she's a thorough-bred lady or not, as I have never seen her; but I must maintain that she's pretty. She'll do all the talking for Bootle, and that's some recommendation."

"Yes, there's no fear of that," replied Mrs. Shelmerdine.

While this arrangement was going on, Captain Musgrave had come to grief at the roulette-tables,

as will be seen from the following letter addressed by Hornby to his friend Rufus Trotter:

"On our arrival at Baden-Baden, Musgrave could never keep away from the rouge et noir and roulette tables, and being rather lucky at first, talked of breaking the bank, and all that sort of thing. But ere long all his winnings vanished, and every stiver he possessed went with them. Being in a desperate fix, he begged me to lend him a few hundreds till he could get a remittance from England. I got him what he wanted from the governor, and off he set at once to the Conversations Haus, and lost the whole of it. Again he applied to me, and I was fool enough to lend him three hundred more. This was swept away in no time by the croupier's rake, and as I chanced to be standing near the table, watching his game, he asked me for twenty pounds. Moved by his desperate looks, I emptied my pockets for him, to

give him a last chance—but he lost it. Next day, he tried it on again, but I had now had enough, and refused point blank, adding that I must trouble him to repay me the money I had already lent him. He replied very coolly that he should suit his own convenience, and walked away. Knowing he was regularly cleaned out, I fancied he couldn't leave Baden-Baden, but he did contrive somehow to discharge his bill at the Hôtel de l'Europe, and started that very night for Paris. People say that a *petite dame* took compassion upon him, and helped him out of his difficulties. As far as I am concerned, I have heard nothing of him since, and conclude that I have lost my money.

"P.S. I must tell you another thing, old fellow. You have lost your chance with Tiff. She is engaged to Mr. Bootle Brooke Shelmerdine, of Belfield Hall, Lancashire."

On his return from Baden-Baden with the Flaxyards, Bootle took the trouble to run down to Belfield, and then discovered for the first time how strongly his mother was opposed to his engagement. Her objections, however, weighed little with him, though he listened quietly enough to them. Eventually, Mr. and Mrs. Shelmerdine came up to town, for the purpose of making the acquaintance of the family with whom they were to be connected, and put up at the Palace Hotel, Buckingham-gate, where rooms had been engaged for them by Bootle.

Here Mrs. Shelmerdine sat in state, and received her intended daughter-in-law and the Flaxyard family.

Sorry are we to say that the unfavourable notion that Mrs. Shelmerdine had formed of Tiffany was not removed by the young lady herself, but rather confirmed. Tiffany's manner, we may infer from

the effect she produced, was better calculated to please men than women, for when Mrs. Shelmerdine asked her spouse what he thought of Bootle's choice, he replied that she was an uncommonly fine girl, and that Bootle was a lucky dog.

On the whole, John Shelmerdine was very well pleased with his new connexions, and the Flaxyards, especially the head of the family, were equally well pleased with him. The two elderly gentlemen talked over matters in a straightforward, business-like manner in the back room of the shop in Cheapside, and soon came to a perfect understanding. Old Flaxyard was delighted to learn that his son-in-law's expectations were much greater than he had supposed. If all went well, John Shelmerdine said, Bootle would one day be a rich man, and, meantime, he would not be badly off.

As a matter of course, the Shelmerdines were invited to dine at the Acacias. But the description of the entertainment must be postponed to another chapter.

II.

A DINNER-PARTY AT THE ACACIAS.

THE country residence — if Clapham-common can be properly styled the country—of our worthy friend Mr. Flaxyard was a good-sized respectable-looking house, deriving its name from a couple of fine acacia-trees with which the smooth-shaven lawn in front was ornamented.

The Acacias was not remarkable for beauty of architecture, but was plain, rather old-fashioned, and roomy; reared, we should conjecture, about fifty years ago, when Clapham was not so much

over-built as it is now, standing a little back, defended by a low wall from the road, and approached by a couple of gates with a broad gravel drive leading to the door, having stables and outbuildings at the side, and a good garden at the back.

Such was the external appearance of the Acacias, and we may add that the internal accommodation of the house more than answered to its outward promise. The house was larger than it looked, and contained better rooms than might have been expected, and those rooms were handsomely, not to say splendidly, furnished.

On the day after the arrival in town of the Shelmerdines, and about five o'clock in the afternoon, an omnibus stopped at the gate of the Acacias and set down the owner of the house. Now, Mr. Flaxyard had more than one carriage—he had a well-appointed phaeton for the ladies,

and a brougham for himself—and Hornby had a dog-cart in which he always drove to Cheapside —but the old gentleman generally used the 'bus. He had peculiar notions, and did not like either phaeton or brougham to stand at his shop door. On the day in question he had come home earlier than usual, as he expected the Shelmerdines to dinner, and though he had an excellent and trustworthy butler, Mr. Burgess, he liked to look after his wine himself. The door was opened for him by a stout, respectable man-servant, not in livery —Mr. Burgess, in fact—and, after saying a few words to him in the hall, he proceeded to the drawing-room, which was on the ground floor, and here he found his wife and daughter.

"Well, ladies, what do you think?" he cried. "I've a surprise for you. I've made a slight addition to our dinner-party, and have invited a gentleman whom we met on the Continent."

"We met so many gentlemen on the Continent,

that I can't pretend to guess whom you mean, my dear," remarked Mrs. Flaxyard.

"I'll tell you who it is, ma," said Tiffany. "He has invited Mr. Myddleton Pomfret. I heard Hornby say he is in town."

"Quite right, Tiff," said Flaxyard. "Mr. Pomfret is the identical person I have asked."

"And is he really coming?" inquired his wife. "I fancied, since the unpleasantness at the Beau-Rivage——"

"Oh, that's all got over," interrupted Flaxyard. "I saw Mr. Pomfret on business to-day, and he was so very friendly that I couldn't help inviting him, and he promised to come. I told him all about your engagement to Bootle, and that he would meet your intended and his family, and at the same time I took good care to explain that we had no longer any acquaintance with Captain Musgrave. So he promised to come."

"Well, I'm very glad of it," said Tiffany. "I like Mr. Pomfret. But why didn't he bring Eva with him? I should have been delighted to show her my darling little Bootle. I wonder what she would think of the dear boy? Perhaps she would be one of my bridesmaids."

"Write and ask her. She is in the country—at Hylton Castle, near Dorking."

"Hylton Castle! Why, that's Sir Norman's place!" exclaimed Mrs. Flaxyard. "What on earth is she doing there? Is she married to Sir Norman?"

"Not yet, my dear. Mr. Pomfret, it appears, has taken Hylton Castle till Christmas, and that's the reason why his ward happens to be there."

"Well, it's the oddest thing I ever heard of," cried Tiffany. "I shouldn't wonder if she and Sir Norman do come together after all."

"Sir Norman is still on the Continent, and not

likely to return. I asked Mr. Pomfret the question myself. Pray what have you done with darling Bootle? I thought I should find him here."

"The dear boy has been here all the morning, but he went up to town after luncheon," replied Tiffany. "Hornby will bring him back in his dog-cart. By-the-by, pa, some people are coming in the evening. We mean to get up a little dance."

"Very well, my dear; it's all right."

"I shall be very glad when it's all over," said Mrs. Flaxyard. "I do feel so dreadfully nervous about Mrs. Shelmerdine.'

"How silly you are, ma!" cried Tiffany. "Why need you trouble yourself about her? I know you think she snubbed you yesterday; but I'll take good care she shan't snub me."

Wishing to avoid a discussion, Flaxyard betook

himself to the cellar; and from the liberal preparations which he there made, it was evident that he did not intend to stint his guests. He next took a walk round his garden, visited his greenhouses, conferred with his gardener, and then returned to the house.

Meanwhile, Hornby and darling Bootle had arrived in the dog-cart, and after a little chat with the ladies, had gone up-stairs to dress for dinner.

At a little before seven the sound of carriage-wheels on the drive in front of the house, and the loud ringing of the door-bell, announced an arrival, and shortly afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Shelmerdine were ceremoniously ushered into the drawing-room by Burgess, where the host and hostess, with Tiffany, now attired in a charming dress which she had brought from Paris, were waiting to receive them.

Mrs. Shelmerdine was very richly arrayed, and

it was rather amusing to see in what a stately manner she comported herself towards her new connexions. She did not even kiss her intended daughter-in-law, and made Mrs. Flaxyard feel more nervous than ever. John Shelmerdine's manner offered a marked contrast to that of his wife. He was cordiality itself, shook hands warmly with Mrs. Flaxyard, clapped old Flaxyard on the back, and did not neglect to kiss Tiffany, and very heartily too.

Other guests followed quickly, most of them being denizens of Clapham. There were Alderman and Mrs. Cracknall, the Rev. Mr. Barker and Mrs. Barker, Tom Titterton, a distinguished member of the Stock Exchange, Mrs. Pritchard and Miss Celsia Pritchard, Mr. Stonehouse, an old acquaintance of the reader, and Rufus Trotter.

All these were presented to Mr. and Mrs. Shelmerdine, and felicitations of course were offered

on an approaching happy event, and these felicitations were renewed when darling Bootle made his appearance with Hornby.

At last, Mr. Myddleton Pomfret was announced. His fine figure and striking countenance could not fail to attract attention, but there was one person upon whom he produced a remarkable effect. This was Mr. Stonehouse. His keen grey eyes followed Pomfret with an expression of the strongest curiosity, and he watched him narrowly while he was talking to Mrs. Flaxyard and Tiffany, and telling them how much delighted Eva was with Hylton Castle. As soon as he could manage it, Stonehouse drew his host aside, and said to him:

"Who is the tall gentleman just come in? I didn't exactly catch his name."

"He is Mr. Myddleton Pomfret,' replied Flaxyard. "We met him when we were abroad."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Why on earth do you ask such a question, Stonehouse? Do you think I can be mistaken on the point? Mr. Pomfret is a Madras merchant, a partner in the well-known house of Bracebridge, Clegg, and Pomfret."

"Bless my life! that makes it still more extraordinary," said Stonehouse. "I tell you what, Flaxyard, but for the assurance you have given me, I could have sworn that this gentleman was no other than Julian Curzon, who was drowned some years ago in Windermere. I shall take it as a particular favour if you will introduce me to him."

The introduction took place. Pomfret bowed courteously but distantly. When he spoke, Stonehouse absolutely started, and exclaimed:

"The very voice of Julian Curzon!"

Pomfret's admirable self-possession did not desert him at this trying juncture.

"I see you are struck by my likeness to my

poor friend Julian Curzon," he said. "I have often been mistaken for him."

"I don't wonder at it," cried Stonehouse, looking quite stupified. "The likeness is astonishing. Excuse me, Mr. Pomfret. I knew Julian very well—I may say intimately—and I knew most of his friends—at least by name. But I don't recollect hearing him speak of you."

"Perhaps not," rejoined Pomfret, haughtily. "But I have often heard him speak of you, Mr. Stonehouse, and in no very complimentary terms."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Flaxyard, who was listening to the discourse; "you've brought this upon yourself, Stonehouse."

"Well, that wasn't particularly grateful of him," remarked Stonehouse, "seeing he was under considerable obligations to me. He always applied to me when he was in difficulties; and as he was generally in difficulties, that was pretty often;

and I never refused him assistance. I lent him a good deal of money, Mr. Pomfret."

"I am quite aware of it," rejoined the other; "but I fancy you received good interest for the loans."

"Oh yes, I can't complain of that," said Stonehouse. "I had to wait some time for my money, but I got it in the end. I believe I have to thank you for the payment, sir."

"I do not desire your thanks," said Pomfret, sternly. "I had my own reasons for paying you."

"I should like to be informed of them," observed Stonehouse.

"No, no—not now," interposed Flaxyard, uneasily. "Some other time, if you please, gentlemen."

"Mr. Stonehouse shall be welcome at any time to my explanation," said Pomfret; "but I think,

if he reflects a little, he will easily understand *why* I thought proper to pay him."

So saying, he turned abruptly away.

"You have offended him, I fear, Stonehouse," said Flaxyard.

"Can't help it if I have," rejoined the other. "He has been deucedly rude to me."

Very opportunely at this moment, dinner was announced by the butler, and each gentleman leading out the lady assigned him, the whole party repaired to the dining-room.

As a matter of course, the host took Mrs. Shelmerdine, and Mr. Shelmerdine had the honour of conducting the hostess to her chair. Alderman Cracknall brought out Mrs. Barker, and was placed on the left of the hostess. It is almost superfluous to say that darling Bootle sat next to dearest Tiffany. With the disposition of the other guests we do not concern ourselves.

The dinner was excellent, but served in the exploded style of some twenty years ago. Had the ladies been allowed to have their own way it would have been served à la Russe; but Flaxyard, who yielded to his wife and daughter on most points, was firm in this, and would not consent to the innovation. He would not have flowers on the table; he would see his dinner; he would compel Mr. Shelmerdine to dispense the turtle soup, and to carve the boiled turkey and the game. He would have all the entrées and the side dishes ranged before the guests, and—horror of horrors in Mrs. F.'s eyes!—he would have the cloth removed in order that the brilliancy of his table, which reflected every countenance like a mirror, might be admired.

Nevertheless, the dinner, though somewhat heavy and substantial, was excellent of its kind, and admirably cooked. The clear turtle soup, coming

as it did from Mr. Paynter, was perfect; the turbot and smelts were equally good; and the saddle of mutton was in the finest possible order, done to a turn, and carved, we are bound to say, in most efficient style by the host.

Old Flaxyard piqued himself on his carving, and it was pleasant to watch him during the process. He declared that he did not like to be at the mercy of a butler. Servants never help you properly, and either give you too much fat or too little, he said. Undoubtedly, there is something to be said in favour of having the joint before you and carving it yourself, provided you are a dexterous hand, and know what you are about. If the wing of a chicken with a slice of Montanches ham is brought you from the sideboard it is all very well, but not quite so satisfactory if you get only a drumstick. Still worse, if you are badly helped to mutton.

Excellent as were the viands, we must say that the best part of our old friend's dinner was the wine. The Johannisberg was superb, and came from the cellars of Prince Metternich; the sherry was marvellous—it had belonged to Marshal Soult, and cost three guineas a bottle; and what shall we say of some rare old Madeira, which Mr. Burgess handed round just before the sweets? Words are wanting to praise it sufficiently.

Throughout the repast, Mr. Stonehouse, whose curiosity had been strongly excited, kept his eye upon Pomfret. He was favourably placed for this scrutiny, being seated opposite to him, and could hear all he said. The more closely he observed Pomfret, and the longer he listened to him, the more certain he became that it must be Julian Curzon. Impossible, he thought, that two persons could be so much alike. And yet how to account for Julian's reappearance! Determined to unravel

the mystery, he commenced by addressing a few inquiries to Tiffany, who happened to be next him, but she was so much occupied by darling Bootle, that she scarcely attended to what he said, and the little he gleaned from her rather perplexed him than otherwise. Pomfret was by no means unconscious that he was the object of this scrutiny, but he did not seem to heed it, and regarded Stonehouse with haughty contempt.

"If he should turn out to be Julian Curzon, I'll expose him," thought Stonehouse. "His insolence deserves punishment."

Watching his opportunity, he called across the table, "We were talking just now of poor Julian Curzon, Mr. Pomfret. His widow seems to have been more unfortunate in her second marriage than in her first. I understand she was separated from Captain Musgrave within a month. One might almost say that a fatality was attached to her."

"Dear me! I hope not, Mr. Stonehouse," said Mrs. Flaxyard. "I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Musgrave in Paris, and a more charming person I never beheld."

"So I thought her," said Stonehouse, keeping his eye upon Pomfret as he spoke. "I saw her at Bowness just before the sad occurrence that deprived her of her first husband, and most beautiful she looked, I can assure you. I can almost fancy I see her as she embarked one morning upon the lake with poor Julian. That was the very day before the accident."

"Perhaps you won't dwell too much upon that, Mr. Stonehouse," remarked Pomfret. "The subject is painful to me."

"Then I'll drop it, of course," said Stonehouse. "But pray can you inform me what has become of Mrs. Musgrave? I understand she has not returned to her father."

"I can give you no information concerning her," replied Pomfret, coldly.

"Mrs. Musgrave is greatly to be pitied," remarked Mrs. Flaxyard. "But I must say she was lucky in getting rid of the captain. He's a confirmed gambler. Have you heard that he lost all his money at the gaming-tables at Baden-Baden, Mr. Pomfret?"

"Yes, I have heard something about it," he replied.

"Everybody abuses Captain Musgrave now," said Tiffany, "but I can't help taking his part. I must say that I thought him very agreeable."

"I rather think you did," remarked darling Bootle, in a low tone. "I thought you would have broken your heart when he went away. For my part, I shouldn't have grieved if he had blown out his brains, as that German baron did."

"He had too much sense for that," laughed Tif-

fany. "You are still jealous of him, I perceive, darling boy."

"Jealous! not I. But I could never understand what you could find to admire in him. To my thinking, he is about as handsome as a nigger, though not half so well bred."

"He has acquired the art of pleasing, and practises it with tolerable success," rejoined Tiffany. But seeing that her lover looked annoyed, she added, "I won't tease you about him any more, darling boy. So far from caring for his society, I thought him a bore, and I shouldn't have tolerated him at all if he hadn't been Hornby's friend."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," returned Bootle. "I certainly didn't like his attentions."

"He wouldn't be kept at a distance. But if you hadn't been as blind as a bat you would have perceived that I was only amusing myself with him. I couldn't have a serious thought about

him. It was a very different case when a certain person addressed me," she said, significantly; "then I felt serious enough, because I knew *he* was in earnest.

"I should never have proposed to you at Eberstein if Musgrave had been there. Perhaps *you* recollect that occasion?"

"Perfectly," she replied, with a secret laugh. "My pleasantest memories will always be associated with Eberstein. After that pretty speech, I hope you'll be content, and not exhibit any more jealousy."

Just then Mrs. Flaxyard made a move, and the ladies arose and prepared to withdraw.

"I wish you would take me with you," said Bootle, gallantly, to Tiffany. "I shall count the minutes till I rejoin you."

"Amuse yourself by thinking of Eberstein and the Murg-thal in the interim, darling boy," she said, as she retired.

III.

A WALTZ, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

WHEN the gentlemen reappeared in the drawing-room, they found it full of company. Tiffany had just played a brilliant piece on the piano, but she sat down again to please Mr. Shelmerdine, who was enraptured by her performance, though Mrs. Shelmerdine told him she played too much like a professional. The rest of the company, however, were loud in their applause. After a little more music, vocal as well as instrumental, Hornby proposed a waltz, and the motion meeting with general

concurrence, Miss Celsia Pritchard sat down at the piano, and played a lively little prelude, while Hornby, Rufus, and several other young gentlemen were engaging their partners.

It was at this juncture, when a buzz of lively conversation, intermingled with light laughter, resounded through the room; when old Flaxyard and John Shelmerdine—both of whom had drank a good deal of '34 port—were expressing the warm regard they felt for each other; when Mrs. Flaxyard was vainly trying to conciliate the haughty Mrs. Shelmerdine, who did not attempt to conceal her weariness, and had just inquired whether her carriage was come; when darling Bootle was standing by the piano chatting to Tiffany, and looking supremely happy—it was at this moment, we say, that the butler announced Captain Musgrave

Captain Musgrave! Impossible! Old Flaxyard, his wife, Tiffany, and, above all, Hornby

and Bootle, thought they could not have heard aright. But their doubts were dispelled the next moment, as Musgrave entered the room. His appearance caused an extraordinary sensation among the company, as well it might. Luckily, Myddleton Pomfret was not exposed to the annoyance, having left earlier in the evening. Mr. Stonehouse also was gone. The cup of happiness was dashed in an instant from Bootle's lips, and bitter rage succeeded.

Musgrave did not seem in the slightest degree embarrassed by the glances of astonishment directed towards him, or by the observations made. He was got up in faultless style, and looked exceedingly well. With inimitable coolness he crossed the room and made his bow to the hostess, who was so confounded that she could hardly find words to address him.

"I am afraid you will think this visit an intru-

sion on my part, Mrs. Flaxyard," he hastened to say, "and perhaps I have presumed too much upon our intimacy at Baden-Baden, where you were good enough to receive me at all hours; but I have only just returned from Paris, and having accidentally learnt that you had friends dining with you, I ventured to present myself in continental fashion."

"Your visit is certainly unexpected," she rejoined, scarcely knowing what to say.

Having gone through this ceremony, Musgrave approached the piano, bowed to Tiffany, smiled at Bootle, who replied by an angry scowl, and then proceeded to shake hands with old Flaxyard, who was so astounded that he was unable to draw back.

"What confounded assurance the fellow must have," remarked Bootle to Tiffany. "I hope Hornby will kick him out."

"I don't know what brings him here," she replied, laughing. "But I think it great fun."

"I can't see the slightest fun in it," rejoined Bootle. "I think it an infernally impudent trick."

By this time Hornby had recovered from the surprise into which he was thrown by Musgrave's unlooked-for appearance, and now advanced towards him. But even he was not proof against the captain's coolness.

"Charmed to see you, my dear Hornby!" said Musgrave. "I owe you ten thousand apologies. You know why I left Baden so abruptly? Couldn't help it. Quite ashamed to have been so long in your debt. My chief object in coming here this evening is to repay you."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Hornby, still more surprised, and quite disarmed by the other's wonderful assurance.

"Yes, indeed! I called at your place of busi-

ness this morning, but wasn't fortunate enough to find you within. Hearing that you would certainly be at home in the evening, and being most anxious to discharge my debt, which has really weighed on my conscience, I came here. In this pocket-book," he added, giving him one, "you will find bank-notes to the amount of the sum I owe you."

Hornby was now quite overcome.

"Upon my soul, my dear fellow, I have done you a great injustice," he cried.

"I know you have looked upon me as a swindler," laughed Musgrave, "but I am not quite so bad as you thought. I never left a debt of honour unpaid."

"Well, I am bound to say you have acted most honourably in my case," said Hornby.

Proceeding to the piano, Musgrave then addressed himself to Tiffany, who, in spite of

Bootle's dark looks, received him very smilingly, and began to laugh and chat with him as of old.

Darling Bootle had now become frightfully jealous. He walked away from the piano, and sat down beside his mother. Apparently, Tiffany was so much amused that she paid no attention to the dear boy.

"Do let me have the pleasure of waltzing with you once more," said Musgrave to Tiffany.

"I don't know what to say," she replied. "I should like it. But Bootle is very jealous."

"Oh, you must teach him betimes what he may expect as a married man."

Several couples now began to whirl round the room. Tiffany enjoyed a waltz of all things, and she was so excited by the spectacle that she yielded to Musgrave's solicitations. His arm had just encircled her waist, and they were about to start

off, when Bootle came up, looking very red and very angry.

"Sit down, Tiff," he said, authoritatively.

But the injunction was disregarded, and he was driven aside by Musgrave, who had started off with Tiffany.

"That girl will never suit you, Bootle," said his mother, as he returned to his seat.

"I don't think she will," he rejoined. "I wish I hadn't gone so far with her."

"If she cared for you, she wouldn't dance with that man," continued Mrs. Shelmerdine.

"I won't stand it. She knows I hate him. The fellow has a mocking grin upon his countenance. I believe they're laughing at me. I was a fool to propose to her."

"It's not too late to retreat," said Mrs. Shelmerdine. "And it's the wisest step you can take. Seize the opportunity given you. Leave

the management of the matter to me. I'll get you out of the scrape."

As soon as the waltz was over, Musgrave, who foresaw that a scene was likely to occur, bade good night to his partner, bowed to Mrs. Flaxyard, nodded to Hornby, and disappeared.

Seeing Mrs. Shelmerdine rise with the evident intention of taking her departure, Tiffany hurried towards her, and said:

"Dear me! you're not going to run away? It's quite early. I must have a galoppe with you, Bootle."

"Not to-night," he rejoined, sternly. "I'm going."

"Why, you silly fellow, you're not angry with me for waltzing with Captain Musgrave, surely? You shan't go till we have had a dance together of some sort."

But Bootle would not be appeased.

By this time Mrs. Flaxyard had come up, and vainly sought to induce Mrs. Shelmerdine to stay a little longer. Mr. Flaxyard was then summoned, and offered his arm to the lady to conduct her to her carriage.

"Well, this is very naughty of you, Bootle," said Tiffany, detaining him. "I shan't forgive you, unless you make a very humble apology to-morrow."

"I don't know that you will see me to-morrow," he rejoined, with a cutting look. "I should say it's not very likely."

"Do you hear that, ma?" cried Tiffany. "Darling Bootle says we shan't see him to-morrow."

"Good gracious! Why not?" cried Mrs. Flaxyard.

"I fear I shall be obliged to detain him during the morning," remarked Mrs. Shelmerdine.

"But you'll all come and dine here," said Flaxyard, "quite in a friendly way."

"I see nothing to prevent it," said John Shelmerdine, with a cheery laugh. "We shall be very happy—shan't we, dear?"

"I hope Mrs. Flaxyard will be kind enough to excuse us. We have an engagement."

"An engagement!" cried John, surprised. "I know nothing about it."

"Oh, yes we have," rejoined his better-half. "You've forgotten it. I'll remind you of it presently."

"But Bootle won't like to stay away."

"The darling boy has just said he can't come," remarked Tiffany.

"Can't come! How's this?" cried his father, looking at him in surprise.

"My dear, the carriage is waiting," observed Mrs. Shelmerdine.

"Let it wait," rejoined John, bluntly. "Something is amiss, I perceive. What is it, my love?" he added to Tiffany.

"I really can't tell, sir. You had better ask Bootle."

"Well, Bootle, my boy, what is it?" said his father, turning to him.

"Nothing material," he replied. "I've changed my mind, that's all. I don't mean to be married just yet."

"Oh! good gracious, Bootle! what have I done to deserve this?" cried Tiffany. "How have I incurred your displeasure, darling boy?"

"By waltzing when I told you not," he rejoined, in a severe voice.

"Don't make yourself ridiculous, sir," said his father. "This is the silliest lovers' quarrel I ever heard of. Make it up directly."

"I don't think it a silly quarrel," observed Mrs. Shelmerdine, in her stateliest manner. "I en-

tirely approve of Bootle's conduct. He objected to Miss Flaxyard's waltzing with a particular gentleman, but, in spite of his objection, she persisted. I don't wonder he is offended."

"Yes, I *am* deeply offended," said Bootle.

"You are a fool," cried his father. "Go and waltz with her yourself, and let us hear no more about it."

"Excuse me, Mr. Shelmerdine," said Tiffany, in a faint voice. "I don't feel equal to another waltz—even with darling Bootle."

"Be firm," whispered Mrs. Shelmerdine to her son, fearing he might give way. "I must wish you good night, Mrs. Flaxyard."

"Stay a minute, my dear madam," said old Flaxyard. "Do let us set these young folks right. A word will do it. I'm sure Tiff's very sorry."

"Well, if she will admit that," said Mrs. Shelmerdine.

"No, I won't say I'm sorry, simply because you ask me," rejoined the young lady, sharply. "I think if any one ought to beg pardon, it's Bootle, not me."

"I think so too," laughed John Shelmerdine.

"If Bootle does, he's no son of mine," said Mrs. Shelmerdine, with dignity.

"Bootle has no such intention," said that young gentleman.

"Well, I'm exceedingly sorry that an evening so pleasant as I have found it should terminate in this manner," said John Shelmerdine; "but let us hope that all will be amicably settled in the morning."

"I entirely echo that wish," said old Flaxyard, "and I only regret that we cannot arrange the little difference now. But I dare say they both will have come to their senses in the morning."

Poor Mrs. Flaxyard was very much distressed by

the occurrence, and tried to interfere, but in vain. Hornby was equally unsuccessful in the attempt he made to pacify Bootle, who was as obstinate as he was stupid.

While taking leave of Tiffany, John Shelmerdine told her that his son was a silly fellow, but she needn't have the slightest uneasiness; he was sure to come round. Old Flaxyard conducted Mrs. Shelmerdine to her carriage, and Bootle, after making a formal bow to Tiffany, followed them out of the room.

No sooner were the Shelmerdines gone than Hornby observed to his sister:

"I tell you what it is, Tiff—that waltz with Musgrave has lost you a husband."

"Don't think it," she replied. "I shall have him here to-morrow morning to beg pardon."

IV.

TWO NOTES FROM TIFFANY.

On the morning after the untoward event described in the last chapter, Mr. and Mrs. Shelmerdine sat at breakfast in a private room at the Palace Hotel. The lady looked elated, but John was evidently much put out by the occurrence of the previous evening.

Always late, Bootle had not yet made his appearance, nor did he turn up until long after his father had finished breakfast, and got deep into the leading article of the leading journal. John

scarcely returned his son's salutation, but Mrs. Shelmerdine was all smiles and sweetness, and begged Bootle to ring for hot toast, hot coffee, and a broil. Bootle complied with the suggestion; but as there were plenty of other things on the table, he set to work at once upon the wing of a chicken and a slice of tongue. While he was thus employed, his father, who had been watching him for some time with suppressed wrath, at last broke out:

"A pretty business you made of it last night, sir. You placed me in a most unpleasant position. Never in my life did I hear of so silly a quarrel! What was it all about? A mere trifle, of which no sensible man would have taken the slightest notice. The whole thing would have been absurd, if it had not ended seriously. I felt heartily ashamed of you, sir. I fancied you were really attached to Miss Flaxyard, but I can scarcely

believe so after your ridiculous conduct. Even admitting that you had some reasonable grounds for annoyance—and I can't admit anything of the sort—you ought to have acted like a gentleman."

"I hope I did act like a gentleman, sir," pleaded Bootle.

"Your father did not see all that passed, and refuses to lend credence to my explanation," said Mrs. Shelmerdine, with an approving smile at her son. "I watched Miss Flaxyard narrowly, and highly disapproved of her manner towards that impudent Captain What's-his-name. Since she was foolish enough to waltz with him, after your prohibition, delivered, I must say—for I heard it—in a very gentlemanlike, proper manner, I think you were perfectly justified in the course you pursued—perfectly justified, I repeat. Your father takes a widely different view of the matter, but never mind. You are in the right. Now that

the thing is over, I may candidly confess that I could never have tolerated Miss Flaxyard as a daughter-in-law."

"Ha! well! I don't exactly like giving her up," said Bootle. "I was in a deuced passion last night, but a little soda and brandy has calmed me this morning. Perhaps I was rather too impetuous. What do you think, sir?" he added to his father.

"Don't appeal to me. I've already given you my opinion," replied John, gruffly. "I think you behaved absurdly."

"Be ruled by me, Bootle," said Mrs. Shelmerdine, beginning to be alarmed. "In a case of this kind a mother is the best judge; in fact, the only judge. Having got entangled by a vulgar, designing girl, you may esteem yourself singularly fortunate that she has furnished you, by her conduct, with a pretext for breaking off the engagement.

As soon as you have finished breakfast, write to inform her that the affair is at an end."

"Think twice before you take that step, my boy," said his father. "Recollect that this designing girl, as your mother describes her, happens to have thirty thousand pounds."

At this moment the waiter came in with a broiled whiting, and at the same time placed a note in a pink envelope before Bootle.

"Just been left for you, sir."

"Any answer required?" asked Bootle, turning pale as he recognised Tiffany's handwriting.

The waiter replied in the negative, and withdrew.

"From Miss Flaxyard, I presume?" remarked Mrs. Shelmerdine, glancing scornfully at the note. "Give it to me, and I'll read it aloud, while you go on with your breakfast."

Bootle not venturing to make any objection, she opened the note, and read as follows:

"'DARLING BOOTLE,—How very, very sorry I am that I annoyed you. It was very thoughtless in me to valse with that horrid Captain Musgrave, but I have been sufficiently punished for my folly. I couldn't sleep a wink last night.'"

"D'ye hear that?" cried John. "'She couldn't sleep a wink.'"

"Neither could I," added Bootle, sympathetically.

"'I am the more vexed with myself, because I feel that, besides annoying you, I have offended dearest Mrs. Shelmerdine. I should be grieved, indeed, if I thought that I had forfeited *her* good opinion. But you must set me right with her, dearest boy. Though awfully afraid of her, as she must have perceived, I love her and respect her; and you may confidently assure her, dearest boy, that she will ever find me a dutiful daughter.'

"Well, if I felt certain she would act up to this, I might change my opinion of her," remarked Mrs. Shelmerdine. "I fancy she does stand in awe of me."

"She thinks you a very superior woman," observed Bootle. "But finish the letter."

"'As to dear Mr. Shelmerdine, I am not the least bit afraid of *him*. He's the nicest man I ever met, not excepting my own darling Bootle. Pray tell him so.'"

Here Mrs. Shelmerdine coughed rather incredulously.

"'What I have said will convince you of my earnest desire to render myself agreeable to your family. It won't be my fault if they don't like me. Dearest Mrs. Shelmerdine shan't have to complain of me again — neither shall you, dearest boy. Dear Mr. S., I am sure, has forgiven me already. So let the silly affair be forgotten. Bring them

both to luncheon, and we will drive afterwards to the Crystal Palace. Adieu, dearest boy!

"'Your ever affectionate

"'THEOPHANIA FLAXYARD.'"

"A very nice amiable letter," said John, as his wife concluded. "Of course we must go to luncheon, my dear. We can't do otherwise."

"Hum! I don't know about that!" cried Mrs. Shelmerdine. "The letter appears creditable to the girl, but I think it has been written with an eye to effect. Eh day! here's more of it," she added, as a thin leaf of paper, which had been placed inside the note, dropped out.

"Better let Bootle read that to himself, my dear," said John, rather uneasily. "That's private."

But his wife's quick eye had caught a few words that incited her to go on. After scanning

the letter for a few moments with looks that scared both Bootle and his father, she read it aloud with bitter emphasis, pausing occasionally to make a sarcastic observation.

"'This is your letter, dearest boy. The other, as you will readily guess, is for the benefit of the elderly party, who has the enviable privilege of calling you her son. If mischief has been made, that malicious old woman—I am sorry to speak so disrespectfully of my darling Bootle's mamma, but I can't help it—if mischief has been made, I say, *she* is the cause of it. I valsed with that odious man merely to show how little I cared for her, and for no other reason. You had prepared me for the sort of person I should find her, but I didn't expect——'

"What have you been saying of me, Bootle?" demanded his mother, pausing, and looking severely at him.

Very much confused, Bootle made no direct reply, but merely begged her not to read more.

"I *shall* go on," she observed, with lofty scorn. "It is perfectly immaterial what such a girl as this may say of me, but it is *not* immaterial that I should be disparaged by my son."

Clearing her voice, she continued:

"'I didn't expect such a terrible old Tartar. She soon let us see that she looked down upon us all, and didn't think me half good enough for you. I fancy I have a little spirit. At all events, I can't stand this sort of thing. So, when she sent you to bid me sit down, I wouldn't. Now you have the truth, dearest boy.'

"A very nice young lady, I must say," remarked Mrs. Shelmerdine, in a contemptuous parenthesis. "'As to your governor, I dote upon him. Hornby calls him a regular brick, and so he is. After this explanation, darling Bootle, I am

sure, will forgive his devoted and truly penitent Tiff, and come to luncheon.'

"Come to luncheon, indeed!" exclaimed the incensed lady, throwing down the letter. "After indulging in all this vulgar slang, after calling me 'a terrible old Tartar,' does she suppose I will ever enter her father's doors again?"

"Consider, my dear," said John, who had been laughing to himself, "that the letter you have just read was not meant for your eye. She would have never called you a terrible old Tartar to your face."

"I trust not," rejoined Mrs. Shelmerdine. "But I suppose you are gratified by the elegant epithet she has applied to you? You like being called a 'regular brick,' I make no doubt?"

"I don't mind it in the least, my dear," he replied, laughing. "But whether we approve of slang or not, neither you nor myself can take umbrage at anything contained in that second letter, which was not meant to be shown us. And

allow me to add, that there is a good deal of force in what Miss Flaxyard says—namely, that you yourself have been the cause of this disturbance. You were certainly very rude to her family, and no wonder she should resent such treatment."

"I dislike her. I dislike her family, and I made no attempt to dissemble my feelings. They are a vulgar set, but she is worst of all, and it would have been an inexpressible grief to me if Bootle had been linked to her for life. How he could ever have engaged himself to such a creature passes my comprehension. I can really discover nothing in her, either in mind or person."

"I thought her—and, for that matter, still think her—remarkably pretty," said Bootle.

"So she is," observed his father. "A little fast, and rather too fond of slang, but she'll mend when she's married. I'll warrant she has the making of a good wife."

"Good or bad, she shall never be Bootle's wife

with my consent. Luckily, the engagement has been broken off. There must be no renewal of it. Bootle shall immediately despatch a note, which I will dictate for him, informing Miss Flaxyard that we cannot possibly have the honour of taking luncheon at the Acacias this morning, since we are leaving town at once for Lancashire."

John uttered an exclamation of disapproval, and, getting up from his seat, moved towards the window.

"Do as I tell you, Bootle," said his mother, in a low voice, and with a significant look at him. "She won't suit you."

"Well, I don't know that," he rejoined, doubtfully. "I rather think she would."

Here John turned round, and, leaning against the back of a sofa, addressed his wife.

"Why won't you allow Bootle to please himself, my dear? He doesn't regard the girl and her

family with your eyes. You allow your prejudices to interfere with your judgment. The lass is not half so bad as you represent her. In fact, can't find any fault with her, except that, as I just now observed, she is rather fast. But she'll soon lower the pace, especially if you will take the reins in hand."

"I take the reins in hand!" exclaimed Mrs. Shelmerdine, scornfully. "Don't expect it, sir!"

"Well, she would go quieter if you did. But allow me to finish what I have begun. If you deny Miss Flaxyard every other recommendation, you must at least admit that she has an important one—a good fortune. Bootle will do well to consider that before he writes the letter you suggest."

"Her fortune need be no temptation to Bootle. Let him marry a lady, even if she has nothing."

"He cannot honourably retreat from the en-

gagement he has entered into; neither can I support him in withdrawing from it. However, he must decide for himself. What do you say, Bootle?" he demanded, almost sure, from his son's looks, of the answer he should receive. "Will you be guided by your mother or by me? Are you for the train to Bury, or for luncheon at Clapham?"

"Upon my soul, I can't make up my mind," replied Bootle, glancing undecidedly from one to the other.

At this moment the waiter entered the room, and, to the surprise of all present, announced Mr. Flaxyard.

"Mr. Flaxyard! Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Shelmerdine. "Let me get out of the room."

But a graceful retreat being impossible, she kept her seat.

V.

BOOTLE'S DECISION.

MR. FLAXYARD was ushered in, and his manifest nervousness was not dissipated by the looks of the haughty dame.

John, however, shook hands with him, and inquired after the ladies, and so did Bootle, though less cordially.

"Have you breakfasted?" asked John, pointing to the table.

"Thank you! yes," rejoined Flaxyard. "I must apologise to you, ma'am, for this early visit," he added to Mrs. Shelmerdine, "but we have all been so much distressed by what took place last night, that I could not rest till I had seen you. I am charged by my daughter to say how much she regrets the occurrence. She would not offend you for the world."

Mrs. Shelmerdine, who looked very dignified, inclined her head slightly, but made no reply. Poor Flaxyard was rather abashed, but recovering himself, he went on:

"Without meaning to flatter you, ma'am, I must take leave to state that my wife and myself, impressed by your distinguished manner, have recommended you as an object of imitation to Tiffany, and she has promised to take you as a pattern. May I be permitted to tell you what she said of you this morning?"

"No, I thank you," rejoined Mrs. Shelmerdine, haughtily. "I am quite aware of Miss Flaxyard's opinion of me."

"She entertains the very highest opinion of you, ma'am; that I can unhesitatingly declare," said Flaxyard. "Over and over again, with tears in her eyes, did she reproach herself in such terms as these: 'What will dear Mrs. Shelmerdine think of me? How shocked she must be at conduct so different from her own! How thoughtless and silly I was, to be sure—but I meant no harm! I shall never feel happy till I obtain her forgiveness. Darling Bootle understands me, and will overlook my fault—but his mother, whose standard of propriety is so very high, will condemn me, I fear, without listening to my defence.' These were her exact expressions, ma'am, and I think they will convince you of the sincerity of her regret, as well as of her anxiety to please you."

Mrs. Shelmerdine listened with a smile of incredulity.

"Either you are trifling with me, Mr. Flaxyard, or your daughter has imposed upon you," she said. "I have proof, under her own hand, of the opinion she entertains of me. Read that, sir, and you will see in what respectful terms I am mentioned."

And she gave him the enclosure which had just caused so much confusion. As he cast his eye over it, he turned crimson, and glancing angrily at Bootle, said,

"Did you give this to your mother, sir? If so, I consider you have been guilty of——"

"Hold! my dear Mr. Flaxyard," interposed John. "I must exculpate Bootle. The letter fell accidentally into my wife's hands. I am very sorry she has read it—that is all I can say."

"Well, ma'am, the most sensible plan will be

to treat the matter as a bad joke," remarked Flaxyard. "Men of business like Mr. Shelmerdine and myself always write in a plain straightforward way; but ladies—especially young ladies—are not so guarded, and sometimes, as in this case, mistake smartness for wit. Bootle must accept some of the responsibility of this unlucky letter, since it evidently represents his sentiments quite as much as Tiff's. But I regard it as a mere joke, and if he were to write about me in the same style, and describe me as a stout old party, I should merely laugh."

"I never write letters," remarked the young man.

"I cannot accept your explanation, sir," said Mrs. Shelmerdine, maintaining a haughty and inflexible look, "if your daughter can speak of me in such terms——"

"Why, my dear madam," interrupted Flax-

yard, "your son must have spoken of you in precisely similar terms. Ask him. He can't deny it."

Bootle offered no contradiction.

Here John, much to his wife's disgust, burst into a hearty laugh, in which Flaxyard could not help joining.

"Mr. Shelmerdine," said his wife, reproachfully, "I think you might show a little more consideration for my feelings. I have been grossly insulted."

"Pardon me, madam, I do not think so," rejoined Flaxyard, becoming suddenly grave. "We have all the greatest regard and respect for you."

"Your daughter has a strange way of showing her respect."

"Come, my dear, you have said quite enough," remarked John. "When no offence is intended,

none should be taken. Bootle is the cause of it all."

"I!" exclaimed the young gentleman.

"Take it upon your own shoulders," whispered his father.

"Well, I am certainly bound to admit that Tiffany wrote that letter to amuse me; and no doubt it would have amused me, if——"

"Enough," cried his mother. "You are just as bad as she is."

"Well, then, they'll make a nice pair," laughed John. "I think the difficulty is got over," he whispered to Flaxyard. But he was mistaken.

"Mr. Flaxyard," said the lady, "it would be improper to disguise from you that I disapprove —strongly disapprove—of my son's marriage with your daughter. You may imagine that my dislike to the match originated in Miss Flaxyard's conduct last night, and has been increased by her letter

this morning. No such thing. All along, as Mr. Shelmerdine will tell you if he speaks the truth, I have been opposed to the union. On what particular grounds, it is unnecessary for me to say. But, for fear of misapprehension, I will state plainly that I think the match in every respect unsuitable to my son."

"My dear, do, pray, consider," said John.

"I will not qualify my expressions in the slightest degree," rejoined Mrs. Shelmerdine. "I think the match wholly unsuitable to Bootle."

Poor Mr. Flaxyard looked confounded, and utterly at a loss what to say.

"I wish Tiff were here to answer her," he mentally ejaculated; "I cannot."

However, he roused himself, and said, with some spirit,

"I must at least admit, madam, that you are plain-spoken. No mistaking what you mean.

But I should like to hear what Bootle has to say on the subject."

"Bootle will write to your daughter," said Mrs. Shelmerdine, apprehensive lest the young gentleman should commit himself by a reply.

"No, that won't do," said Flaxyard, encouraged by a slight wink addressed to him by John. "I must have an answer now. I will say nothing of my daughter's feelings—of her mother's feelings—of my own feelings—since they appear to be entirely disregarded. An engagement is formed, carried on almost to the last point, and then on a trivial pretext is to be broken off. Permit me to say, ma'am, that it is now too late to signify your disapproval. Mr. Shelmerdine, who ought to have some voice in the matter, has given his full consent, and only yesterday we discussed and agreed upon the terms of the settlements. I was perfectly satisfied with Mr. Shelmerdine's inten-

tions, as I believe he was with mine. Our solicitors are to meet at noon to-day in Lincoln's Inn-fields. Am I to tell them that their services are not required?—that the affair is at an end? I trust not. I cannot think that Bootle, who has professed so strong an attachment for my daughter, to whom she is so much devoted, and whom I and my wife have begun to regard as a son—I cannot think, I say, that *he* will attempt to retreat from his engagement. Naturally, I am sorry to learn, ma'am—and I learn it now for the first time—that the engagement which has met with Mr. Shelmerdine's sanction has not met with yours; but though that circumstance may cause me deep regret, I cannot allow it to weigh with me. My daughter's happiness is at stake—and she must be my first consideration."

A series of winks, delivered from time to time, conveyed to Mr. Flaxyard John's entire approval of this speech.

Mrs. Shelmerdine was far from impressed by the oration, but perceiving, to her dismay, that it had produced an effect on her son, she held up her finger to him. But Bootle disregarded the hint.

"Now, Bootle, speak out like a man," said his father. "Do you mean marriage?"

"Yes, I do," he replied, firmly.

On this, Mrs. Shelmerdine instantly quitted the room.

Both the elderly gentlemen complimented him on his courage, and told him he had done right.

"I have got myself into a nice scrape," remarked John, laughing. "But I don't mind that."

"I may now tell you that the ladies are in the carriage below," said Flaxyard to Bootle. "They'll drive you to the Acacias at once, if you like to go with them."

"Go, my boy—go," urged his father. "You will be better out of the way."

Bootle required no second bidding, but taking up his hat, hurried down-stairs.

He found Tiffany and her mother seated in the phaeton, which was drawn up at the door of the hotel. Tiffany uttered a little cry of delight as she beheld him. She looked so bewitching, that he wondered how he could have quarrelled with her.

Needless to say, he was rapturously received. After a few exclamations of delight, he got into the phaeton, and his mother, who witnessed the scene from an upper window of the hotel, saw him carried off in triumph.

Mrs. Flaxyard was dreadfully shocked when she heard that her daughter's private letter had fallen into Mrs. Shelmerdine's hands, but Tiffany screamed with laughter, and thought it the best joke possible.

"Oh, how I should have liked to see her when she read the letter!" she exclaimed.

"I don't think you would," rejoined Bootle. "Neither I nor the governor found the situation agreeable, I can tell you."

"I'm afraid she'll never forgive you, Tiff," remarked Mrs. Flaxyard.

"Well, I must bear her displeasure as well as I can," said the young lady. "Since I've got my darling boy back again, I don't care for anything else."

Meanwhile, the two old gentlemen remained laughing and talking together. At last Flaxyard took out his watch.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it only wants a quarter to twelve. We mustn't forget our appointment with the lawyers. We must be off to Lincoln's Inn-fields at once."

"A word to the old lady, and I'm with you," replied John.

He disappeared, but presently returned, looking rather blank. Flaxyard, however, made no observation.

The two gentlemen then got into a hansom cab, and drove to Lincoln's Inn-fields.

VI.

HOW MR. STONEHOUSE WAS CONVINCED OF HIS MISTAKE.

AFTER a very satisfactory interview with the lawyers, who undertook that no delay should occur on their part, John drove off to Clapham to join the party at luncheon, and Flaxyard proceeded to the City. Arrived at his place of business, he found Myddleton Pomfret waiting for him in his back room.

"I want to have a word with you, Mr. Flaxyard," said Pomfret, in reference to a gentleman whom I met at your house last evening."

"Mr. Stonehouse! Yes, I understand. I am very sorry I invited him, but I had not the slightest idea there was any risk in doing so. He declares you are no other than Julian Curzon, and that he will prove his assertion."

"In what way can he prove it? None of Julian's relations can be produced. At the time of his disappearance, I don't think he had a single near relative. He was an orphan, left to the care of an uncle, who brought him up, provided for him, and died some years ago, leaving his nephew a considerable sum of money, all of which, I am sorry to say, the careless fellow spent. Julian had plenty of friends, or persons calling themselves friends, but they have long since forgotten him."

"Let me ask you a simple question. Are you able to prove that you are actually Myddleton Pomfret? If so, the point can be disposed of without difficulty."

"I am not required to give any such proof. And I shall certainly not furnish it at the instance of Mr. Stonehouse."

"You do not consider, my dear sir, that he may place you in such a position that you will be compelled to rebut the charge. Of course, if you can show conclusively that you are the person you represent yourself, there will be an end of the matter. But, I repeat, *can* you do this?"

Pomfret made no reply.

"You will believe that I am influenced by the most friendly feelings in giving you this caution," pursued Flaxyard. "I do not ask to be taken into your confidence, though you may place the most perfect reliance on my discretion. But I have an opinion on the matter — and I see danger. Stonehouse can do you personally no harm; but if he can persuade people that you are really Julian Curzon—that the story of your death was

fictitious—see what a position your unfortunate wife will be placed in. For her sake—if not for your own—this disclosure must be prevented."

"I could frighten him into silence, but I don't like resorting to that method," said Pomfret.

"There is one way of silencing him," observed Flaxyard. "Convince him that you are not the supposed defunct Julian Curzon. A plan has occurred to me, that, successfully carried out, might mystify him. Are you aware that Mr. Leycester is in town?"

"Sophy's father!" exclaimed Pomfret. "No, I was not aware of it."

"Stonehouse intends calling upon him this afternoon, and has asked me to accompany him."

"Where is Mr. Leycester staying?—at an hotel?"

"No, at No. 80, Upper Baker-street. His daughter Celia is with him. Thus much I learnt

from Stonehouse. Now, my notion is that you should see Mr. Leycester beforehand, and prepare him for our visit."

"I don't think the scheme practicable," said Pomfret, after a short consideration. "I could not impose upon Mr. Leycester, and it would be a most painful task to me to enter into explanations with him. Besides, I do not know what effect the disclosures might have upon the poor old gentleman, who, I understand, is in a very infirm state of health, and nearly broken by the last calamity that has befallen him. What will he say when he learns the cruel position in which his unfortunate daughter is placed?"

"Her position may be made still worse if care be not taken," said Flaxyard. "However painful it may be to make the necessary avowal to Mr. Leycester, and however much distressed the poor old gentleman may be by what you will have to

tell him, the disclosure must be made. Better anything than that the real facts should come out."

"Well, I will follow your advice. I will see him without delay. Celia, you say, is with him?"

"So Stonehouse informed me. I am glad you have come to this determination. There is no other way of saving one, who I feel—notwithstanding all that has passed—must be still dear to you."

"She *is* still dear to me," exclaimed Pomfret, in broken accents, "and for her sake I will endure this trial."

"Where is the unfortunate lady?" said Flaxyard. "You know that I take a deep interest in her, and will allow me, therefore, to make the inquiry."

"I cannot answer the question," replied Pomfret. "I am wholly unacquainted with her retreat. She has not written to me since her flight from Paris.

Possibly she may be still in France, though I should conjecture, from the fact of Celia having returned to her father, that she must be in this country. I told her to address me at my bankers', in case she had any communication to make to me, but I have not heard from her. If I thought she was with her father, I would not hazard a meeting. But no! no! I am quite sure she has not returned to him."

"I am also of that opinion," said Flaxyard. "About the business at once. There is no time to lose. I will take care of Stonehouse."

Warmly thanking the old gentleman, Pomfret left him, and getting into a hansom cab, told the driver to make the best of his way to Upper Baker-street.

Not without trepidation did Pomfret knock at the door of the house to which he had been directed. The summons was answered by a female

servant, who informed him that Mr. Leycester was very unwell — suffering from his eyes — and she didn't think he would like to be disturbed, but Miss Leycester was within, and would probably see him if he would be good enough to send up his name.

Pomfret complied with the request, and was presently conducted to the drawing-room, where he found Celia. She was alone, and as soon as the servant disappeared, gave vent to her feelings of astonishment and delight on beholding him again. Of course she had been made acquainted by Sophy with all the particulars of his strange story; but prepared as she was, she could scarcely believe that he stood before her.

Pomfret hastened to explain the nature of his errand, and she saw at once how important it was that his incognito should be preserved. And she was of opinion that this might be readily ac-

complished, so far as Mr. Leycester was concerned.

"Had poor papa the perfect use of his eyes, he could not fail to recognise you, Julian," she said. "But at present he is suffering from a severe attack of ophthalmia, and, indeed, has come to town to consult an oculist, so that he will not be able to distinguish your features. I am sure you may safely pass with him for Myddleton Pomfret. Shall I tell him you are here?"

"Yes. But before you go, one word about Sophy. How is she?—where is she?"

"I can give you no information," she replied, sadly. "I have heard nothing from her since we parted at Dover."

With this she quitted the room, and shortly afterwards returned with her father, whom she led by the hand.

Mr. Leycester had once been a tall, fine-looking

man, but he now stooped a good deal. Over his eyes he wore a large green shade. Pomfret was very much moved at the sight of him, and advanced to meet him as he entered the room.

"Mr. Pomfret, papa," said Celia.

"Very happy to make your acquaintance, sir," said Mr. Leycester, warmly grasping the hand which the other extended to him. "Pray be seated, sir. Set me a chair next Mr. Pomfret, Celia." This being done, he went on: "I am beyond expression indebted to you, Mr. Pomfret, for your unparalleled generosity to my daughter Sophy. It distresses me to allude to her, as you may conceive, but I would not appear wanting to you in gratitude. You were a great friend of poor Julian Curzon, sir. Poor fellow! I felt his loss very severely—and so must you, sir, to judge by your noble conduct. I always cite you as a model of friendship."

"You very much overrate what I have done," remarked Pomfret.

"Actions like yours cannot be overrated," said Mr. Leycester. "I am very sorry the condition of my eyes prevents me from distinguishing the features of a gentleman whom I so much esteem, but I can imagine what you are like."

"Indeed, sir!" exclaimed Pomfret, glancing at Celia.

"Mr. Pomfret is very like poor Julian, papa," observed the cunning young lady.

"Then he is like a very handsome fellow," rejoined Mr. Leycester. "But it is odd you should resemble my ill-fated son-in-law in features, Mr. Pomfret, for your voice is so like poor Julian's that I could almost fancy I was talking to him."

"My resemblance to Julian has given rise to more than one curious incident," remarked Pomfret, with a slight laugh. "At dinner yesterday

I met a Mr. Stonehouse, who insisted upon it that I must be Julian come to life again."

"Ah! that's very droll," cried Mr. Leycester, laughing.

"Did you succeed in convincing Mr. Stonehouse of his error?" inquired Celia.

"Scarcely, I think," replied Pomfret. "But it matters very little to me whether I convinced him or not."

"I hope he won't propagate the ridiculous story," remarked Celia. "It is calculated to do a deal of harm."

"In what way, my dear?" said Mr. Leycester. "What possible harm can it do Mr. Pomfret to be thought like his poor friend Julian Curzon?"

"Why, the world is prone to believe strange stories, and the more improbable the story, the more easily will it obtain credit. If Mr. Stonehouse asserts publicly that Mr. Myddleton Pomfret

is no other than Julian Curzon, people will be sure to believe him."

"Well, suppose they do. Mr. Pomfret will laugh at them—that's all."

"He may laugh at them, papa. But it will be a serious matter to us. What will people say if they believe that Sophy's first husband was alive when she married again?"

"Bless me! that did not occur to me. We must stop such mischievous talk. Such a report would give me the greatest annoyance. Already I have endured affliction enough on poor Sophy's account," he added, with a groan. "This would be more than I could bear. Ah, sir, do you recollect Sophy before her marriage with Julian?"

"I do," faltered the other.

"How beautiful she was, and how greatly she was admired! She might have made a splendid match, but she wouldn't be advised——"

"Never mind that, papa," interrupted Celia. "She loved Julian, and of course wouldn't marry any one else."

"More's the pity! Nothing but calamity has attended her ever since. Julian lost within a month—years of grief, during which she appeared inconsolable. Then a brief season of happiness, for which she was entirely indebted to you, Mr. Pomfret. Then a second marriage, luckless as the first, and a sudden separation from a worthless husband. Can a woman be more unfortunate than Sophy has been? Twice unlucky in marriage! And now what would she be if Mr. Stonehouse's notion were correct!"

"Don't think of that, papa. Mr. Pomfret is here to contradict it."

"I have never seen her since the separation from Captain Musgrave," pursued Mr. Leycester, addressing Pomfret, "for she refuses to return to

her family, and won't even acquaint me with her retreat, so that I am unable to write to her. I sometimes think Celia knows where she is, but won't tell me."

"Indeed I don't, papa. Before we parted at Dover, Sophy exacted a promise from me, which, as you know, I have religiously kept, that I would say nothing about her. I would willingly have remained with her if she would have allowed me, but she was resolved to live alone."

"I trust I shall embrace her once more before I die," ejaculated Mr. Leycester. "I am sure her separation from Captain Musgrave was occasioned by no fault of her own. I never liked the man, and would not have consented to her marriage with him, had it not been for Celia's representations."

"We were all completely deceived by him," said Celia; "and if I had had the slightest

idea——But let us change the conversation. It can't be very agreeable to Mr. Pomfret."

Making a great effort to control his emotion, which would infallibly have betrayed him to Mr. Leycester if that gentleman could have perused his countenance, Pomfret turned the discourse into another channel, and began to talk about Miss Flaxyard's approaching marriage. In this event, owing to her acquaintance with Tiffany, Celia took the liveliest interest, and wanted to know all about Bootle. They were still occupied with the subject, when a knock was heard at the door. Celia flew to the window, and exclaimed:

"Why, I declare there is Mr. Flaxyard himself getting out of a cab, and another gentleman with him."

"It is Stonehouse," said Pomfret, reconnoitring them through the window. "No doubt he has come to tell you of the discovery he has made," he added to Mr. Leycester.

"I am glad of it," rejoined the old gentleman. "He shall have my opinion as to his sagacity."

"Pray step into papa's room," said Celia to Pomfret. "It will be best that Mr. Stonehouse should not find you here. If necessary, I will summon you."

Pomfret assented, and Celia showed him into a back parlour, and then returned quickly to her father. Next moment the new comers were ushered in by the servant.

After presenting Mr. Flaxyard to her father, who received him with great cordiality, Celia took the old gentleman aside to make inquiries about his family, and especially about Tiffany's approaching nuptials, while Stonehouse seized the opportunity of opening his business.

"I have a very singular circumstance to relate to you, Mr. Leycester," he said, "and I think it right to prepare you for a great surprise. I had

the pleasure of dining yesterday with my old friend Mr. Flaxyard, and among the guests was a gentleman whom I certainly did not expect to meet."

"Ah, who was it?" asked Mr. Leycester.

"You shall hear anon. But before proceeding, let me remind you that I was extremely intimate with your son-in-law, Julian Curzon."

"I am quite aware of that, Mr. Stonehouse. I fear his intimacy with you led him to the commission of the rash act which deprived my daughter of a husband."

"My dear sir, the rash act, as you call it, was never committed at all. That's the very point I'm coming to. What will you say when I tell you that Julian Curzon is still alive?"

"Alive! ridiculous! Is this the great surprise you have been preparing for me?"

"I solemnly declare to you that I saw him last

night, and conversed with him. Julian Curzon is no more dead than you and I are, Mr. Leycester. He is living and flourishing, and has made a fortune at Madras. He goes by an assumed name, of course; but any one who knew him as intimately as I did, cannot fail to recognise him. You would know him in an instant. I have thought it right to tell you this, sir, that you may take such steps as you may deem proper under the circumstances. Rest assured he is alive."

"All a mistake, Stonehouse. You met Mr. Myddleton Pomfret last night."

"Yes, that is the name Julian goes by—but it won't pass with me."

"But it must pass with you, Stonehouse, since it happens to be the gentleman's real name. Myddleton Pomfret is Myddleton Pomfret, and no other. He is no more Julian Curzon than you are."

"Well, if he is not Julian, his resemblance to

him is marvellous," said Stonehouse, rather staggered. "Am I to understand that you know this self-styled Mr. Pomfret?"

"Yes, we know all about him," interposed Celia, quickly. "We know who he is and what he is —all his pedigree—and can satisfy you in every particular. He is one of the Pomfrets of Burton Constable, in Yorkshire. The Pomfrets are neighbours of ours in that county. Myddleton is a younger son, that is why he has gone into business. He has just been here—in fact, he is still in the house—and came purposely to tell us what occurred last evening at Mr. Flaxyard's dinner. He is extremely offended with you, Mr. Stonehouse, and I think with good reason."

"I told Mr. Stonehouse that he was entirely mistaken," remarked Flaxyard. "But he wouldn't believe me. Now, perhaps, he is satisfied."

"Not exactly satisfied, but a good deal shaken," said Stonehouse.

At this moment the servant brought in a piece of folded paper, saying, as she delivered it to Celia:

"From Mr. Pomfret, miss."

Celia glanced at the note. It contained only a couple of lines, and ran thus:

"Have you anything further to say to me? I am unable to stay longer.—M. P."

"Tell Mr. Pomfret I'll come to him in a minute," said the young lady. Then turning to Stonehouse, she added, "Did you know poor Julian's handwriting?"

"Perfectly well. I've seen it often enough."

"Is that like it?" she inquired.

"I can't say it is," he rejoined, examining the note.

"All doubts must be removed," said Celia.

And she hurried out of the room, but returned the next minute accompanied by Pomfret, who very haughtily saluted Stonehouse.

"Now, Mr. Stonehouse, what do you say?"

cried Celia. "Do you still maintain your opinion?"

"Look me in the face, sir," cried Pomfret, sternly, "and declare before this company whether you really believe me to be Julian Curzon."

"I'm rather puzzled about it," replied the other, uneasily.

"It is lucky for you, sir, that my poor friend is no more," continued Pomfret. "Had he been living he would have had an account to settle with you. Some documents in my possession prove that your transactions with him were not quite straightforward."

"My dealings with him were all strictly correct, and will bear investigation," interrupted Stonehouse, evidently alarmed.

"I am inclined to think, that if Julian were alive, he could and would give you trouble," said Pomfret, with stern significance. "If you doubt

what I say, I will show the documents in question to Mr. Flaxyard."

"That is not necessary, sir," said the gentleman referred to. "I am sure Mr. Stonehouse will not persist in his assertion."

"No, I am ready to admit that I was in error," said Stonehouse. "I now discern a great difference between Mr. Pomfret and my late friend Julian. I beg to apologise for my mistake."

"This is something, but not enough," rejoined Pomfret. "Wherever this erroneous statement has been made, there must be a contradiction. I insist upon that."

"I have said nothing as yet," rejoined Stonehouse. "I came here first, wishing to talk over the matter with Mr. Leycester."

"Lucky for yourself you did," observed that gentleman. "However, I think you have behaved very properly in owning yourself in the wrong."

Stonehouse, who felt himself in a very humiliating position, bowed around, and made his way to the door. Flaxyard followed him, and, while passing Pomfret, observed, with a laugh,

"That was a very dexterous manœuvre. You have silenced him effectually."

Pomfret did not remain long after the others. He dreaded further conversation with Mr. Leycester.

VII.

THE MARRIAGE AT CLAPHAM.

DARLING BOOTLE now reigned supreme at the Acacias, and was supremely happy. No more jealousy; no more quarrels; constant smiles from Tiffany; lively talk and merry laughter with Hornby; cheerful discourse with the elderly folk; drives to Wimbledon, Richmond, Kew, Hampton Court, in the morning; nice little dinners, and very often a private box at a theatre in the evening.

Tiffany had received a lesson, and profited by

it. The Flaxyard family generally being fully sensible of the advantage of the match, did their best to further it. Hornby was assiduous in his attentions to Bootle, and took care that he should experience no further annoyance from Musgrave. Even Hornby's bosom friend, Rufus Trotter, was kept away, lest his presence should prove detrimental. Mr. and Mrs. Flaxyard likewise studied all Bootle's peculiarities, and made an extraordinary fuss of the young man, consulting his tastes upon all points, and bowing to all his opinions.

Meantime, preparations were actively made for the approaching nuptials. The bride's trousseau, on which one of the most fashionable West-end modistes was employed, was almost completed. The wedding-day was fixed, and the bridesmaids were chosen. Eva was asked to be one of them, but declined. Her refusal was no great disappointment to Tiffany. She had plenty of young friends,

who would be delighted to assist on the occasion, and she selected the prettiest among them. Bootle's best man was Captain Standish, a relation of his own on his mother's side. The captain had been introduced at the Acacias, where everybody found him particularly gentlemanlike and agreeable. Business matters, to which old Flaxyard attended, had likewise been completed. The settlements had only to he signed.

But what about Mrs. Shelmerdine? What was she doing all this time? After signifying her strong disapproval of the match, and her firm determination not to countenance it with her presence, she returned to Belfield. There she remained; but John came up to town again for the express purpose of attending the wedding.

At last the auspicious day arrived.

All Clapham was astir to see the lovely bride drive to church from her father's house. The

young couple would have liked to be married at St. George's, or St. James's, or some fashionable church, but they were overruled by Tiff's mamma, who was quite resolved that the marriage should take place at their own church on the Common. The Rev. Mr. Barker must perform the ceremony, and no one else. This was the only point on which Mrs. Flaxyard made a decided stand, and as she was supported by her husband, the young people were compelled to give way. Better be married at Clapham than not be married at all, thought Tiff; and so reconciled herself to the arrangement. Moreover, it was settled that the display should be just as grand as if the marriage had taken place at the most aristocratic church in town. Two new carriages were brought out on the occasion, one of which was presented to the bride by Mr. Shelmerdine. Besides these, there were several other handsome equipages, which,

when drawn up in a long line after setting down their occupants, excited the admiration of the beholders. The Common road was quite in commotion. Omnibuses and all other vehicles went slowly past, and a crowd collected in front of the Acacias was with difficulty kept out by the policemen stationed at the gates.

The marriage of old Mr. Flaxyard's daughter, a reputed heiress, and considered the belle of Clapham, had been much discussed among the tradesfolk of that populous suburb, and everybody wanted to see how she was dressed, how she looked, and what sort of person she was about to espouse. Rumour asserted that the fortunate youth who had won the prize was handsome as well as rich. It remained to be seen whether rumour was correct.

At last the carriages were called, and the excitement of the crowd became intense. The omnibuses would not move on despite the shouts of the police,

and numerous butchers', bakers', greengrocers', and fishmongers' carts blocked the way. Boys climbed the walls, gazing through the iron railings at the scene taking place at the door, and screaming information to those below. The bridesmaids, we have said, were chosen for their beauty, and, as they all belonged to Clapham, Clapham, as represented by the little boys at the railings and the crowd at the gates, hailed them with shouts. Opinions varied as to the bridegroom. Captain Standish rode with Bootle in a brougham belonging to the latter, and some uncertainty prevailed as to which of the two was the fortunate individual. When it became known that the boyish-looking personage with the blonde moustache was the hero of the day, some foolish people shook their heads, and said Miss Flaxyard had chosen the wrong man.

Bootle's demeanour towards the throng did not improve their opinion of him. Yet Bootle flattered

himself he looked remarkably well, and no doubt he was remarkably well got up. However, nobody thought more about him when the bride appeared. Tiffany never looked prettier than she did in her charming bridal attire and veil of Honiton lace. Excitement imparted brilliancy to her complexion and lustre to her eyes, and as she smiled complacently at the crowd, and displayed her pearly teeth, there was a genuine burst of admiration.

A host of little boys and grown-up people ran across the Common to have another look at her. At the church door a scene almost similar to that we have just described took place; only the bridal party could be better seen as they descended from their carriages. Again an audible titter pervaded the throng as Bootle marched slowly towards the church door, and a fresh burst of admiration greeted Tiffany as she alighted from her carriage and was conducted into the sacred edifice.

The church was full, and the presence of so

many spectators, instead of agitating the timid bride, inspired her with confidence. She went through the ceremony admirably. Her worthy old father was much affected when he gave her away, but his real feeling was not so effective as her feigned sensibility. John Shelmerdine was completely imposed upon, and thought his son had, indeed, got a treasure. Ah! if he could have read Tiffany's breast! If he could have seen what emotions were really passing within it! If he could have perceived how, under that guise of timidity, she secretly exulted, he would have formed a very different estimate of her character.

The ceremony was over, and Tiffany was now what she had long desired to be, a married woman. She was Mrs. Bootle Shelmerdine. She could not repress her delight. Bootle remarked her triumphant look, and was gratified rather than displeased by it. It seemed perfectly natural to him

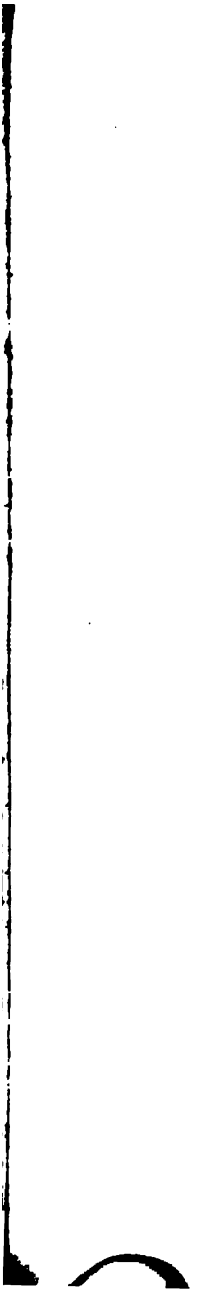
—perfectly natural to his father—perfectly natural to everybody who witnessed the ceremony, that she should be elated.

There was a splendid wedding-breakfast at the Acacias. But we cannot assist at it, and shall merely mention that the happy pair proceeded to Folkstone, on their way to Paris.

End of the Fourth Book.

BOOK V.

HYLTON CASTLE.



I.

THE ARRIVAL AT THE CASTLE.

A MORE picturesque old structure than Hylton Castle cannot be imagined. Standing upon a hill, the slopes of which are clothed with trees, only the upper part of the ancient edifice, with its mullioned windows, embattled roof, and lofty chimneys, can be discerned from the charming valley that lies at the foot of the eminence. The mansion, however, cannot be approached on this side. The proper entrance will be found at the farther end of the park, nearly two miles off.

But before quitting the valley, through which wanders a lethargic little river, not unknown to fame, and dear to the angler, let us bestow another look on the antique mansion. Not much of it can be seen, as we have intimated, for it is literally buried in trees, and its broad terrace is screened by a row of yew-trees that cast a funereal shade on the walk, and darken the lower windows of the habitation; but a good idea can be gained of the place, and imagination will readily complete the picture. Those grand old trees—oak, chesnut, ash, elm, beech — impart a romantic character to the pile, which would be lost if they were removed. The timber, indeed, is magnificent, and constitutes the chief beauty of the picture. Nobler groves cannot be seen than crown the summit of the hill, and extend over the whole of the lordly domain. The mansion, when examined as we propose to do anon, is the mere wreck of its former grandeur,

neglected, decaying, desolate; but thus seen, the ravages are hidden that time and neglect have caused. The mighty trees that have grown old with the building, but yet exult in their full strength, stretch their arms lovingly around it, and shield from observation its gloomy terrace, its crumbling walls, its deserted courts, and dilapidated chambers. Shrouded by these contemporaries and friends, it looks haughty as of yore—haughty as when reared by the first Hylton, upwards of three centuries ago.

And what a matchless situation did that proud Hylton choose for his castellated mansion! Heights overlooking a region of almost unequalled beauty—a lovely vale shut in by chalky downs, with a castle and priory in the distance; on the right, a wide expanse of heath, forest, and fertile plain; on the left, and divided only from the eminence by a valley, another hill clothed

with mysterious and immemorial groves. Such was the view commanded by Hylton Castle in former days, and the main features of the scene are still unchanged. But the builder of the castle heightened the natural beauty of the spot; converting the forest land into a park, opening glades, and thinning the timber, but carefully preserving all the finest trees—among others, a grove of chesnuts, even in *his* time of great size and age—and planted a long avenue of lime-trees in triple rows, which has now not its equal in the kingdom.

Eva was charmed with the old mansion, as she first caught a glimpse of it, while flying past on the railway, which conveyed her to a small station close to the farther end of the park. Nor was she less delighted when, passing through the lodge gates, and entering on the domain, she came at once upon a row of gigantic chesnut-trees, with

enormous twisted trunks and fantastic branches. None of these remarkable trees were exactly alike —some being so strange in shape that they looked like antediluvian monsters reared on end—but each tree in succession excited her wonder and almost awe. She counted more than fifty of the giants. Who planted those enormous trees? Pomfret, who was in the carriage with her, could not answer the question—could not even guess at their age.

Independently of the fine timber which it disclosed to their view, the drive through the lower part of the park was striking. Immediately beneath, on the left, through breaks in the trees, could be seen the river to which we have alluded —now crossed by an ancient stone bridge with pointed arches—now dammed near a picturesque water-mill, so as to form a large pool, while beyond it rose a down, the summit of which was

covered with ancient box-trees. Eva was quite enchanted by the beauty of the scene. On whichever side she gazed fresh points of attraction caught her eye. The slopes and hollows were clad with gorse and ferns, and studded with ancient thorns, and the uplands crested with noble trees.

But the incomparable avenue had yet to be seen. In order fully to enjoy its beauty, Pomfret alighted with his ward, and sent the carriage on by a lower road. On entering the avenue they both stood still, almost in awe. Graceful and majestic trees, springing like slender columns from the ground, and forming a lofty arch overhead, extended in long lines to the brow of the eminence on which stood the ancient mansion, its grey portal being just distinguishable. Marvellous was the beauty of those lime-trees. Lofty, straight, clean-stemmed, vigorous, not a single tree mani-

fested the slightest symptom of decay. As the eye swept along the beautiful and extensive arcade, regular as the aisle of a cathedral, not a single vacancy could be descried. The picture was perfect in all its details. Exquisite was the effect of the sunshine on the overarching boughs —delicious the screen they afforded. Not a single ray penetrated through the foliage, and yet there was no gloom. The stillness, though impressive, did not awaken melancholy thoughts. On the contrary, the mind was completely absorbed in admiration of the grace and lightness of the trees.

Such was the impression produced by this glorious avenue upon Pomfret and his ward as they slowly tracked it, ever and anon pausing to look back.

When they emerged from the avenue, and approached the mansion, evidences of neglect became manifest. The road was grass-grown and almost

obliterated. The iron hurdles, which ought to have defended the lawn, were rusty and broken; the lawn itself was ragged, and unconscious of the scythe. The parterres had become a wilderness of weeds. Flowers were choked; shrubs had grown wild; and roses had become little better than briars. The mansion, which at a distance looked so stately and imposing, had a strange deserted look. No guest, it was clear, had lately entered by that porch, the rich decorations of which were encrusted with lichens and moss.

Still, in spite of all this neglect, the aspect of the mansion was exceedingly striking. Quadrangular, solidly constructed of stone, parapeted and embattled, with turrets at the angles, a superb portal in the centre, large projecting bay-windows with stone transoms, the structure presented a grand façade. Unluckily, the turrets and battlements were ruinous, and the noble portal sadly dilapidated.

Though Pomfret and Eva had been prepared for a partially dismantled, neglected house, they scarcely expected to find it in such a lamentable condition, and they were contemplating it with some feelings of dismay, when an elderly woman, of very respectable appearance, issued from the portal.

This was Sir Norman's old housekeeper. Mrs. Austin had heard of their arrival from the coachman who had brought them from the station, and now came forth to greet them. Apologising for the state of the place, she explained, as indeed was only too apparent, that it had been greatly neglected, but promised to make them as comfortable as circumstances would permit. She then ushered them into the mansion, and Pomfret expected they would be taken into one of the large rooms with bow-windows, but Mrs. Austin told him that this part of the house was disused, and conducting him and Eva across a court, which did

not appear so much neglected as the external part of the mansion, brought them to a suite of apartments, fitted up with old oak furniture. This wing, Mrs. Austin observed, was the only part of the castle that had been occupied of late years. Sir Norman, she said, talked of furnishing the other rooms, and of repairing the place generally, but nothing had been done as yet.

Pomfret now began to take heart, especially when he found that Eva was perfectly satisfied with the place. Later on in the day, when the young lady's own attendant arrived, with other servants, and when general arrangements both for Eva's comfort and his own were made, he became quite reconciled to the house; but he promised his ward that before many weeks had elapsed a transformation should take place in its appearance.

And he fulfilled his promise. In a marvellously short space of time the old place underwent a

change; the garden was put in order, and a considerable portion of the interior of the mansion rendered not only habitable, but agreeable. The superintendence of these changes afforded Eva occupation and amusement, and this was what Pomfret desired, for during the greater part of the time he was necessarily absent.

There was a strange interest attached to the old mansion, which perhaps in its palmier days it did not excite. Accompanied by the housekeeper, Eva visited all the deserted rooms. Many of them were noble apartments, with deep bay-windows and richly carved chimney-pieces, but all were dismantled and dilapidated. One entire wing was shut up. All the old furniture had been removed many years ago, Mrs. Austin said, and there was not even a picture left upon the dark oak panels.

After they had inspected all the upper rooms,

she asked the young lady if she would like to see the prison-chamber, and, upon being answered in the affirmative, conducted her to a vault of considerable size, the solid stone walls, grated windows, and ponderous door of which seemed to indicate that it might have been used as a strong-room. Were no legends connected with the vault? Tiresome Mrs. Austin could relate none. And the old lady rather destroyed the romance of the place by declaring it would make an excellent beer-cellar, and that she had recommended Sir Langley Hylton to use it for that purpose.

Now was the opportunity for questioning the old housekeeper about the haunted room. Eva seized it.

"Sir Norman told me there is a haunted room," she said. "Show it me, please."

"You have seen it already, miss," replied Mrs. Austin, after some hesitation.

"Indeed! Is it one of those deserted chambers which we have just visited? I fancied so at the time."

"No, I won't tell you an untruth, miss; it i not one of those rooms. I would rather you didn't ask me where it is—not that I believe in ghosts or anything of the sort, but you yourself might be frightened."

"I must insist upon knowing," cried Eva. "I don't believe in ghosts any more than you do, so I shan't be alarmed if you tell me that mine is the haunted chamber."

"A very good guess, miss," replied Mrs. Austin, a smile lighting up her wintry features. "Yours *is* the haunted room. But you needn't trouble yourself about the ghost. Many a night have I slept in that room, and have never seen it. It's the best room in the wing; but you can have another, if you desire it."

"Oh dear no! I am perfectly content with the room. It is charming. But don't say a word to Susan. She is dreadfully timid, and I'm sure she won't sleep in the dressing-room if you tell her about the ghost."

"Don't fear me, miss," said the austere dame. "I know what ladies'-maids are."

The chamber occupied by Eva, and correctly described by Mrs. Austin as the best bedroom in the house, was spacious, situated at an angle of the edifice, and commanded the lovely valley we have described. The room retained much of its original character; it was wainscoted with oak, and had furniture to correspond. Its most noticeable feature was a massive bedstead, with curiously carved posts, black as ebony from age, and richly embroidered silk curtains, though now, of course, faded and tarnished. Adjoining the chamber, and communicating with it by a side-door, was a small room, in which Susan slept.

Never since she occupied it had Eva heard the slightest sound to occasion alarm. But on the first night after she had obtained this piece of information from Mrs. Austin, she was too much excited to sleep. No spectre, however, appeared —no noise was heard. And after a few more tranquil nights, she forgot all about the ghost.

But though Eva liked the old mansion, neither Susan nor any of the other servants, who had been engaged in town by Pomfret, liked it, and would greatly have preferred a mansion similar to those adorning the neighbouring hills.

Eva had everything to make the country enjoyable—saddle-horses, carriage-horses, a well-appointed barouche, and a pony-carriage, which she herself could drive. In other respects her establishment was complete, and she had Mrs. Austin to manage the servants, and take all trouble off her hands.

With such an establishment, and with all else conducted upon a corresponding scale, a country residence could not fail to be pleasant, even though that residence should be as tumble-down as Hylton Castle. But the dilapidations did not annoy Eva. Half such a large old house was enough for her, and more than half was now habitable. Ample room, and to spare, was there for her household and for her guests, for she had always some of her relatives staying with her, and her aunt, Mrs. Daventry, a very agreeable, well-informed person, had agreed to reside with her for a few months. Thus she was never alone, and she might have had plenty of general society if she had cared for it.

There was one material drawback to her happiness. Hylton Castle was charming, the yew-tree terrace sombre and mysterious, the park delightful, the avenue exquisite, the neighbourhood beautiful,

the rides and drives inexhaustible, but the one person whose society she preferred to all other was rarely—far too rarely—with her.

Pomfret was chiefly in town, occupied by business, he said, and only ran down now and then, and never stayed more than a day when he did come. Besides, he was making arrangements to return to Madras, and then she should lose him altogether for a time.

II.

A LETTER AT LAST FROM SOPHY.

LONG had Pomfret been without any intelligence of Sophy, but calling one day at his bankers' to inquire for letters, a bulky packet was delivered to him.

He recognised the handwriting at once, and, hurrying to his hotel, repaired to his own room, fastened the door, and broke open the seals of the packet.

Enclosed was the following letter. It was closely

written, in Sophy's beautiful hand, and occupied several sides of paper.

"Perhaps this letter may never meet your eyes, but it will relieve my heart to write it. Mental torture could scarcely be more acute than that which I experienced after my interview with you in the Bois de Boulogne. I felt that I was on the verge of madness. Unavailing regret for the happiness I had for ever lost, horror at my dreadful position, and despair of escape from it, these were the feelings that beset me. Hope I had none. For a time Heaven seemed deaf to my prayers, and denied me the relief rarely refused to the heart-broken.

"A fearful night was that on which I fled from Paris, hoping, but vainly, to leave my cares behind me. The train was crowded, and the carriage in which Celia and I were placed was full. Perhaps

this was fortunate, since it compelled me to restrain my emotion. None of those with me, except Celia, could have been aware of the anguish I endured, but they must have thought me unsociable for I uttered not a word.

"The night was wild and tempestuous, and soon after quitting Amiens a terrible thunderstorm came on, accompanied by vivid lightning; but though usually terrified by a storm of this kind, I felt no terror then. Celia afterwards told me that she was alarmed at the expression of my features, as revealed by the flashes of lightning. I know that I felt fearfully excited. though I did not betray myself by a single exclamation.

"Before we reached Calais the thunderstorm had ceased, but the wind was still violent, and Celia was very unwilling to cross, but I would not remain another hour in France, and of course she went with me. It was an awful passage, but we got safely to Dover, and as Celia, who was utterly

prostrated, was unable to proceed farther, we stopped there.

"Next day, the excitement, which had given me false strength, forsook me. I could not leave my bed, and was slightly delirious, but Celia kept careful watch over me. A large and bustling hotel like the Lord Warden is ill suited to a nervous sufferer. I was removed to quiet lodgings, where I was undisturbed, and where I speedily began to recover strength.

"One fear had assailed me during my illness, and increased my nervous irritation. It was the fear lest he who had been guilty of such infamous perfidy towards me should follow me, and find me out. I constantly expected him to appear, and the sound of a footstep filled me with dread. Before leaving Paris I had written to him, forbidding him to come nigh me, but he might not regard my injunctions.

"My alarm, however, was groundless. He came

not, and I now do not think he had any intention of following me. Without consulting me, Celia had written to him, requesting him to send to Dover all the wearing apparel and other articles that we had left behind at the Grand Hotel. They were sent without a word.

"Celia was most anxious that I should return to my poor father, but I refused. I could not return to him a second time—now not a widow, not a wife. I could not explain my frightful position to him. I could not look him in the face with such a secret in my breast. I was determined to live in absolute retirement, among strangers who could know nothing of my sad story, and who would neither shun me nor condemn me. In such a plan it would be impossible that Celia could take part. A life of seclusion was unsuited to her. She would be speedily tired of it. Besides, her presence would infallibly lead to a discovery, which I was anxious to avoid.

"It was therefore agreed that Celia should leave me and return home, and give such explanation as she might deem proper to my dear father. It was a painful parting with her, and she tried to make me change my resolution. But I remained firm. I was left alone.

"I must now pass over a week.

"While seeking a retreat, I chanced upon a pretty little old-fashioned village, which I will try to describe to you. The village in question has a large green, such as you rarely meet with now-a-days, round which quaint old houses are gathered, intermingled with magnificent elm-trees. At one end of the green stands a picturesque little inn, with an extraordinary chimney, a fine porch, a bay-window, and a charming garden. An artist would fall in love with that little inn.

"Close to the inn is a smithy—also a pic-

ture. Nothing prettier or more peaceful can be conceived than this out-of-the-way little village. It seems to belong to the middle of the last century. Not a modern house in it, or near it. Not one of the habitations would rank above a farm-house or a cottage, yet many of them have crofts and large apple-orchards, and all have gardens. The country around is beautiful. Close at hand there are hills and heights covered with timber. Large mansions, surrounded by parks, crown some of these eminences.

"I had never heard of this sequestered little village before—had never been in this part of the country. Chance, or some beneficent power that took compassion upon me, brought me hither. I was going farther—much farther, indeed—but I at once decided upon remaining here, and alighting from the vehicle which had brought me from the railway station, a few miles off, caused my luggage

to be taken into the little inn I have described, and went in search of lodgings.

"Thinking I might find some retired cottage, I took a path which led me through a meadow skirted by enormous oak-trees to the church—a grey and ancient pile, almost surrounded by trees, with a little avenue of clipped lime-trees conducting to the porch. A churchyard full of rounded hillocks, headstones, and old monuments, showed how many generations were resting there.

"The church door being open, I entered. The interior presented such an aspect as might be expected from an old country church. In parts it bore traces of great antiquity, but many reparations had been made, and not always in the best taste. Still, there were vestiges of the original stained glass in the pointed windows, and some fine brasses in the nave that belonged to the fifteenth century.

"Noticing some monuments in the chancel, I

walked down to look at them. Almost all belonged to one family. Amongst them was a little tablet of white marble that fixed my attention. It bore the name of Sophia, and recorded her death at the early age of seventeen. As I read the simple but touching inscription, I envied the fate of the poor girl, who, though cut off like a flower, was perhaps saved from much sorrow.

"'Would I had died at seventeen!' I murmured.

"So engrossed was I by painful thoughts, that I did not remark that an elderly lady had silently approached me, and had overheard the exclamation. On perceiving her, I was about to retire in some confusion, but she stopped me gently, and said, in a low voice:

"'She was my daughter, and a sweeter creature never blessed a mother. I have never ceased to mourn for her.'

"We then quitted the church together, and as we stood outside the porch she questioned me in the kindest manner possible as to the cause of the exclamation she had overheard.

"I could not enter into particulars, but I told her that I had endured so much unhappiness of late that I was almost weary of life, and that my own name being Sophia had led me into a train of thought that had given rise to the exclamation.

"Her interest was evidently excited in me, and we had a long conversation together, in the course of which I explained that I was looking out for a quiet retreat, and thought I might find one in the adjoining village. On hearing this, she reflected for a short time, and then said:

"'You have inspired me with a strong interest in you, for which I can only account by the circumstances under which we have met. You tell me that your name is the same as that of my lost

child, and had she lived she would have been about your age. My house is not far hence. Come and see it. If you like the place, I will ask you to stay with me. The house is quiet and secluded enough to suit any taste.'

"I could not refuse an invitation given with so much kindness. From the moment I beheld her I had been attracted as by a potent mesmeric influence towards Mrs. Carew. I had learned her name from the tablet. I never saw a more pleasing countenance than hers, nor one more strongly indicative of goodness and genuine kindness of heart. Her manner is pleasing, and the tone of her voice delightful. I have no doubt she was once beautiful, for her features are still good, and her eyes fine, but time and sorrow have left their traces.

"As we walked together in the direction of her house, along a charming road skirted by fine trees,

and passed several homesteads, each boasting a large apple-orchard, she gave me an outline of her history.

"Mrs. Carew has been a widow for several years. She was the second wife of Mr. Morton Carew, a country gentleman of good property, but whose estates went to his son by a former marriage. She herself has no family. Her daughter, who bore the luckless name of Sophy, died early of consumption.

"Ere long we came in sight of her house, and she had not prepared me in the least for the singular structure that met my view. Nothing more curious and picturesque can be imagined. It is an old house, but in excellent preservation, and the walls, roof, and chimneys—the latter being of immense size—are covered with ivy. But the singularity of the place, and that which constitutes its chief charm in my eyes, is, that it is

entirely surrounded by a wide deep moat, and can only be approached by a drawbridge. I have dreamed of such a romantic habitation, but never saw one before. Outside the moat there is a large garden, laid out in the old style, and house and garden are buried in a grove of trees tenanted by rooks.

"Mrs. Carew read my surprise and delight in my looks, and smiling kindly, asked me how I liked the old place. I told her I was enchanted with it, but all seemed so strange that I was not quite sure that I was not in a dream.

"As we crossed the drawbridge, I paused for a moment to gaze at the moat, which lost none of its beauty on closer inspection, being supplied with clear water from a brook hard by. Mrs. Carew showed me over her house. None of the rooms are very large, or very lofty, but they are all comfortable, and fitted up with old furniture. One

bedroom, with windows looking across the moat upon the garden, particularly took my fancy, and remarking that I was pleased with it, she said:

"'This room shall be yours if you like to occupy it. Do not hesitate. I make the offer with all my heart. But I ought to tell you,' she added, and the tears sprang to her eyes and her voice faltered as she spoke, 'that this was my dear Sophy's room. In it she passed the last few months of her brief life, and never quitted it till she was taken to the churchyard we have just visited.' After a pause, she pointed to a few books on a shelf near the fireplace. 'There is her little library. And that is her portrait over the chimney-piece.'

"Glancing in the direction indicated, I beheld the portrait of a beautiful fair-haired girl, whose frame and features bespoke extreme delicacy.

"'Perhaps you may prefer another chamber,'

pursued the kind old lady. 'But despite its melancholy associations, I am fond of this room, and it is close to my own chamber.'

"I told her that I liked the room better than any I had seen.

"'Then take possession of it at once,' she cried. 'Nay, I will have no denial.'

"Need I say that I gratefully accepted the offer. No time was lost in making me at home in my new abode. My luggage was brought from the little inn where I had left it.

"Before leaving Dover, I had taken the precaution of putting the name of Mrs. Montfort on the trunks, and by that denomination I am now known. The initials on my linen could betray nothing. Mrs. Carew's establishment consists of old and attached servants. They believe me to be a niece of their mistress, and are perfectly satisfied, for they are not inquisitive.

"The extreme kindliness of Mrs. Carew's disposition is manifested in a hundred ways—not merely to me, but to all with whom she comes in contact. I do not think there can be a more amiable person. Benevolent almost to a fault, she seems to live for others rather than for herself. She is profoundly religious, but hers is a cheerful, hopeful faith. Without knowing the cause of my sorrow, she affords me the greatest consolation. I shall never be happy again, but she has chased away the despair that haunted me.

"Such is the friend I have obtained! such the asylum I have found! Ought I not to esteem myself fortunate? Ought I to repine?

"Behold me, then, in the little chamber assigned to me by dear Mrs. Carew! There is nothing gloomy about the room, though it has witnessed sad scenes. On the contrary, it has an air of great cheerfulness. From the window,

which would be darkened by ivy were not the intrusive leaves carefully trimmed, I enjoy the prettiest prospect imaginable. Immediately beneath me is the moat; beyond it the garden; and beyond that a grove of splendid trees. I might be in a convent, shut out from all the world. The quietude is indescribable. To some people the place might appear lonely, but to me it is delightful. Mrs. Carew loves tranquillity, and her servants carry out her wishes. All goes on regularly and systematically, but there is no bustle, not the slightest disturbance of any kind.

"We have rarely any visitors, for Mrs. Carew has almost given up society since her daughter's death, but occasionally the vicar and his wife dine with her. Both are elderly people, and both very agreeable. On such occasions I am allowed to remain in my own room. The calmness I have described—a calmness almost monastic, as I have

stated—has produced a beneficial effect upon me. Allowed to do just what I like, I pass most of my time in reading and meditation, and seldom or ever stray beyond the precincts of the place. On her return from a walk or drive, Mrs. Carew generally finds me in the garden.

"Thus time flows on, and if it will only continue to flow on thus tranquilly, I shall be content. My mode of life is so uniform, that in describing one day I describe all.

"I have not taken up my pen for some days, but an event has just occurred which I must relate.

"Yester-afternoon I was walking in the garden with Mrs. Carew, when a remarkably beautiful girl made her appearance. Old Nathan presented her to his mistress, but he mumbled so that I could not catch the name of the lovely visitor.

However, I understood that she had recently come to reside in the neighbourhood, and was now returning a call made upon her by Mrs. Carew. I was greatly struck by the young lady's appearance. Her beauty was not of a common order, and her manner graceful and refined. As she addressed me occasionally, I was forced to join in the conversation. She spoke in raptures of an old mansion which her guardian had taken in the neighbourhood, and pressed me to come with Mrs. Carew to see it.

"Pursuing the conversation, she informed me that she had only recently returned from India, and mentioned that she had been at Madras. My suspicions being then excited, I put some questions to her, though with caution, and soon found out that she was no other than Eva Bracebridge.

"Here, then, was an unlooked-for meeting! A girl whom I would have shunned—whom I supposed was in India—stood before me.

"Instantaneously I felt a revulsion of feeling towards her. I did not now think her so lovely as I had done previously. I fancied I could detect faults in her which I had not perceived before. I almost forgot myself, and gave impatient answers when she spoke to me. Yet I was wrong to indulge such feelings. Eva Bracebridge is charming—charming alike in person and manner —but I regarded her with a jaundiced eye.

"She stayed some time, and during that time I learned much, for she talked a great deal about you, and about circumstances that had occurred at the Beau Rivage at Ouchy, all of which were of the most painful interest to me. During this part of the conversation I was on the rack, but I bore it with firmness. But *you* will understand the effect which these details produced upon me.

"At last, to my inexpressible relief, she took her departure. While bidding adieu, she again pressed me to visit Hylton Castle, which she told

me is the name of the place you have taken for her, but I declined.

"This visit quite upset me, but I pleaded sudden indisposition to account to Mrs. Carew for my changed manner, and retired early to rest. The calmness that had surrounded me in my retreat seemed violently disturbed. All my anxieties were revived. I had a sleepless night, and thought over all the occurrences that had been related to me. Nothing distressed and distract me more than the thought that I should have to flee from this place. Mrs. Carew is so kind to me, and would grieve sorely at my departure. But is it necessary that I should go? Now you know where I am, you can avoid me.

"Some days have elapsed, and Eva Bracebridge has been here again.

"This time she came accompanied by her aunt, Mrs. Daventry, who is staying at Hylton Castle. There is no resisting Eva, she is so extremely amiable and ingenuous, and my unreasonable dislike has vanished. You can read her heart like a book. She has now no secrets from me. I did not seek to learn her secrets, but she would make me her confidante. She spoke to me about you, and told me a great deal more than I choose to repeat. She says you are rarely at Hylton Castle, and are soon about to return to Madras. The thought of losing you for so long a period seems to distress her much, and she says she shall be quite disconsolate when you are gone.

"Poor girl! I pity her from my soul. I offered her the best consolation in my power. Little does she dream that I am the main obstacle to her happiness.

"She spoke of Sir Norman Hylton, and told

me *why* she had refused him. I do not think she will ever marry, unless—but we cannot penetrate the future. When you go to Madras, I shall probably see a good deal of this charming girl, in whom I begin to take a warm interest. Perhaps we have been brought together in this unaccountable manner for some mysterious purpose.

"Eva sat with me in my little room for several hours, while her aunt partook of luncheon with Mrs. Carew. She seemed as if she could not tear herself away. She evidently wished to know something of my history, but finding it pained me to talk about it, she desisted. I dare say she has many speculations about me, but I trust they are all wide of the truth. I now tremble more than ever lest she should learn who I am. She left me far happier than she found me. At all events, she has succeeded in strongly exciting my sympathies towards her. Heaven grant I may be

of some service to her! I would make any sacrifice in my power to ensure her happiness.

"Again I must pass by some uneventful days without notice. I should have little but my own feelings to record. Eva has been here again, and again has passed a few hours tête-à-tête with me in my little room. But it is not of her I am now about to speak. A strange and most unpleasant incident has occurred. This place is no longer a secure asylum for me, and I fear I shall be obliged to quit it. But you shall hear what has happened.

"Last night I sat up late, writing this very letter. All the house had been long since at rest, but, feeling no inclination for sleep, I occupied myself as I have mentioned. It was a calm moonlight night, and from time to time I looked out at the exquisite scene before me. A thin

gauzy mist hung over the surface of the moat, and partially obscured the shrubs in the garden, but the summits of the larger trees were silvered by the moonbeams. The dreamy beauty of the picture enchanted me. It was like a fairy vision. The drawbridge was scarcely distinguishable through the vapour. I fancied, however, that a figure was standing upon it, but, as the person remained motionless, I concluded I must be mistaken.

"After contemplating the ravishing scene I have described for some minutes, I sat down, and again occupied myself with my letter. I was thus employed when I heard a rustling noise among the leaves of the ivy with which, as I have said, the walls of the house are completely covered. Instantly springing up, I flew to the window, which, unluckily, I had left open. But before reaching it, I recoiled. A man's head appeared at the casement.

I should have shrieked aloud at the sight, but the white moonlight revealed well-known features, and terror struck me dumb.

"He was there—the dreaded, the detested;—he, from whom I had striven to hide myself, had found me out. The next moment he had gained the room, and closed the window. I was so paralysed by fright that I could not stir. But he seemed perfectly easy, and said, with a slight laugh, but in a low voice,

"'Ivy serves as well as a rope-ladder to gain a fair lady's chamber.'

"Before I could prevent him, he stepped lightly and quickly to the door, fastened it, and took out the key.

"'Don't make a row, my charmer—you will gain nothing by it,' he said, as he came back, fearing, perhaps, that I was about to alarm the house by my cries. 'Sit down quietly. We must have

a little chat together. You will be surprised that I have found you out, after the precautions you have taken, but in reality I had no difficulty. I quickly discovered your lodgings at Dover, and followed you, step by step, to this place.'

"'What do you want?' I gasped, sinking into the chair to which he pointed. 'Why do you add to the misery you have inflicted upon me by thus invading my retreat?'

"'Pooh! pooh! I am not come here to annoy you,' he rejoined. 'Had such been my design, I should have knocked at the door, and insisted upon seeing my wife, Mrs. Musgrave. Not wishing to betray you, I have sought admittance in this way. After studying the premises, I found your room accessible by means of that good-natured ivy. Plan instantly adopted. Me voilà! How very considerate in you to leave the window open!'

"I said nothing, but I bitterly reproached myself with my want of caution.

"'Allow me to congratulate you upon your quarters,' he remarked, looking complacently round. 'What a charming little room you have got, and how nicely furnished! You could not possibly be more comfortable. And then the old house—how quaint it is, with its ivied walls and chimneys. To-night it looks wonderfully picturesque. I've seen nothing better on the stage. I'm glad they don't think it necessary to raise the drawbridge, or I should have had to swim the moat. Your friend Mrs. Carew, I'm told, is quite as pleasing a piece of antiquity as her house. How on earth did you contrive to make her acquaintance?'

"'Torment me no more,' I cried; 'or, at all hazards, I will alarm the house. If you have any business with me, state it.'

"'You are in a desperate hurry, my charmer. Consider how long it is since we met,' he rejoined, with the same provoking calmness. 'I sup-

pose you have no particular desire to return to me?'

"'Return to you! Never!' I exclaimed.

"'Well, I think you are very well off where you are,' he said. 'Your reluctance to leave old Madam Carew is natural. I won't disturb you, provided we can come to an understanding.'

"'To what kind of understanding?' I asked. 'What do you require?'

"'Money — money, my charmer — that's the burden of my song. After you so cruelly deserted me, I sought distraction in play, and lost heavily at Baden-Baden. I'm hard up. I am sure you have money, and equally sure you can get more if you require it.'

"I felt so indignant, that I was determined to refuse him, and I suppose he divined my intention from my looks, for he hastened to add, in an altered tone:

"'Refuse — and you shall see me to-morrow under a very different aspect.'

"At his sudden change of aspect, my courage quite forsook me, and gave place to abject terror.

"'I will give you all I possess,' I said, 'if you will go instantly, and promise sacredly never to molest me again.'

"'How much have you got?' he inquired.

"'A few hundreds. I don't exactly know how much. But you shall have all.'

"'Ah! now you are reasonable. If I have good luck on the turf, or in any other way, I will repay you.'

"'Never come near me again. That is all I ask. It will be useless to repeat the visit. You now deprive me of all my resources.'

"I unlocked a drawer, and, taking out a little pocket-book containing the greater part of the money which you sent me through Mr. Flaxyard,

gave it to him. I know that I ought not to have done this, but I could not help it. I was so terrified, that I wished to get rid of him at any price.

"'Bien obligé, ma belle,' he said, securing the pocket-book. 'Voici le clef de la porte. Maintenant pour l'échelle de lierre. Adieu, pour toujours!'

"Opening the window noiselessly, he passed out. He accomplished his descent quickly and carefully, and, hurrying towards the drawbridge, almost instantly disappeared.

"I remember nothing more distinctly, but when I awoke next morning, I thought I must have had a hideous dream. The truth soon dawned upon me, and all my terrors returned.

"How shall I act? Shall I disclose what has occurred to dear kind Mrs. Carew? Shall I tell her all my sad story? I feel sure of her sympathy. But no—I cannot do this without betraying your

secret. I cannot fly from the place—I cannot seek another asylum—all my resources are gone."

Mingled emotions agitated Pomfret during the perusal of this letter—sympathy, surprise, indignation, exciting him by turns. That Sophy should have accidentally found an asylum near Hylton Castle, and have formed an acquaintance with Eva, filled him with astonishment and perplexity. But when he learnt that the unhappy fugitive's retreat had been discovered by her betrayer—when the base motives that had incited Musgrave to the quest were revealed to him—he became fearfully incensed. Conduct so infamous could not be tolerated, and he determined at any cost to call the villain to immediate account. But how could redress be obtained? Musgrave would laugh at any threats of exposure. But poor Sophy must not be left without resources. At the same time she must

be guarded against further plunder. Pomfret was long occupied in considering how this could be effected.

That night he left town for Hylton Castle.

III.

AN ACCIDENT.

NEXT morning, after breakfast, he walked out on the terrace with Eva, and at once brought up the subject of Mrs. Montfort.

"I have heard that the poor lady is in great distress," he said. "I mean to assist her, but it must be through you."

"I do not know that she requires aid," replied Eva. "I have no idea that her distress arises from pecuniary misfortunes."

"I will tell you what ha happened to her," he

rejoined. "She has been stripped of her all by a worthless husband. Imagine the distress of a lady under such painful and humiliating circumstances. And there are frightful complications in her case that prevent her from seeking assistance from her own relations."

"A light suddenly breaks upon me!" exclaimed Eva. "I think I know who is her husband. I did not intend to mention the circumstance to you, feeling sure it would annoy you, but about a week ago, as I was driving through the pretty village near which Mrs. Carew resides, I saw Captain Musgrave. He was standing at the door of a little inn, and as soon as he perceived me hurried into the house. But I am certain it was he. And now I feel convinced that this poor lady of whom we have been speaking is his unfortunate wife. The strange and inexplicable interest I felt in her is accounted for. I now understand why she exhibited

such aversion when I spoke of Captain Musgrave —and why her colour changed when I spoke of you. The so-called Mrs. Montfort is no other than Mrs. Musgrave. I am sure I have divined the truth."

"You have. It is the unfortunate lady you suppose. Since her flight from her unprincipled husband she had found a safe asylum, as she believed, with good Mrs. Carew, who, I must warn you, is totally unacquainted with her history. Unluckily, Musgrave discovered her retreat, and, managing to obtain a secret interview with her, forced her to give up all her funds. She is now without resources."

"But not without friends," cried Eva. "I will help her."

"Assistance must be given with caution, or she will again become a prey to her infamous husband."

"Cannot she be freed from his toils?"

"I see not how her deliverance can be accomplished. But let her find a friend in you."

"She shall," cried Eva, earnestly.

At this juncture, a man-servant appeared on the terrace bearing a note, which he delivered to the young lady; stating, at the same time, that the messenger waited for an answer.

Eva glanced at the note, and then, without a word, handed it to Pomfret, who turned pale as he perused it.

"DEAR MISS BRACEBRIDGE,—If Mr. Pomfret should have returned, pray tell him that I have something important to communicate to him, if he will kindly favour me with a call this morning. You may think this a strange request, but I trust Mr. Pomfret will comply with it, if it should be in his power to do so.

"Yours sincerely,

"SOPHIE M."

"What shall I do?" he said, consulting Eva with a look.

"Go, of course," she replied. "Say that Mr. Pomfret will come," she added to the servant.

"And tell Bilton to bring round the horses," said Pomfret.

Charged with these messages, the footman returned to the house.

"I could not refuse this summons," said Pomfret, in a sombre voice. "But it shall be my last interview with her."

"Why the last?" she inquired.

"Do not ask me to explain," he rejoined. "Enough that I dread the meeting, and would avoid it, were it possible. Hereafter you must take my place."

Half an hour later the horses were brought to the door. Mounted on a splendid bay horse, almost thorough-bred, and full of fire and spirit, and followed by a groom also very well mounted, Pomfret

rode slowly down the lime-tree avenue, and when he had gained its extremity he indulged his horse with a gallop across the park. Under other circumstances he would have enjoyed the ride, but he was too much occupied by his own sombre thoughts to heed the beauty of the landscape.

On reaching Mrs. Carew's picturesque residence, he was about to alight, when his horse started, dashed through the open gate, clattered across the drawbridge, and then stumbling, threw his rider at the very threshold of the house. Sophy, who witnessed the accident from her window, uttered a piercing shriek.

At first it was thought by old Nathan and the gardener, who, alarmed by the noise of the fall and by Sophy's screams, rushed to the spot, that the unfortunate gentleman was killed outright, since he did not move; but this supposition was contradicted by the groan that burst from him

when an attempt was made to raise him. Whether his skull was fractured the men could not, of course, decide, but it was clear that he had sustained very severe injuries, since his head had come into violent contact with the post of the drawbridge. The horse was uninjured, and after dashing back over the drawbridge, was caught by the groom. Poor Sophy was in such a state of distraction that she could give no directions, and, indeed, could scarcely command herself; but Mrs. Carew fortunately did not lose her presence of mind, but enjoining the servants to bring the unfortunate gentleman into the house, sent the groom in quest of a surgeon.

As the old lady's directions were obeyed, and Pomfret was carefully raised from the spot where he had fallen and carried into a room on the ground floor, where there was a bed on which he was laid, a very painful scene occurred. Sophy,

who had witnessed the proceeding with indescribable horror, crept after the men into the room, and when they withdrew, flung herself on her knees beside the bed, and gave way to frenzied exclamations of despair, anguish, and self-reproach, which, had they been intelligible, must have betrayed the innermost secrets of her heart. But though her language was wild and incoherent, Mrs. Carew easily gathered enough from it to learn that deep attachment to Pomfret was the cause of her distress; and apprehensive lest the servants should make the same discovery, she closed the door, and strove to calm the distracted lady.

Shortly afterwards the surgeon made his appearance, and yielding to Mrs. Carew's earnest entreaties, Sophy withdrew to her own chamber, and promised to remain there till the old lady should come to her and bring her the surgeon's opinion. Sophy passed the time in prayer, and was still on

her knees when a tap was heard at the door. Mrs. Carew's looks reassured her.

"I bring you good news, my dear," said the old lady. "Mr. Pomfret will recover. He is very much hurt, but there is no serious injury. At the same time, Mr. Southwood says that it will not be safe to move him—at least, for some days—so of course he will remain here, where he can have every attention. I have despatched the groom with a note to Miss Bracebridge, acquainting her with the surgeon's opinion, and telling her that all possible care shall be taken of her guardian, and everything done that can conduce to his speedy recovery. There seems a fatality in this accident."

"If you knew all, you would indeed think so," rejoined Sophy, with a shudder. "Many strange things have happened to me, but the strangest of all is, perhaps, this last occurrence."

"Let us hope that it may lead to good," said

kind-hearted Mrs. Carew. "Indeed, I believe that in the end it will be conducive in some way to your happiness. Without wishing to penetrate your secrets, and without seeking for any information beyond what you may desire to impart, I may say that I am certain, from some expressions which you let fall just now, that you take the deepest interest in Mr. Pomfret."

"It is true," she rejoined. "Had this accident proved fatal, I could not have survived it. But I neither hope nor expect that the feelings that he once entertained for me can be revived."

"There is no saying. It cannot be denied that you are brought together in a most mysterious manner, and it will surprise me very much if a reconciliation should not ensue. You must not shrink from the task before you. You may have to go through a painful ordeal, but I retain my opinion that all will come right in the end. But

let us go down-stairs, and ascertain how he is going on."

Notwithstanding Mr. Southwood's favourable prognostications, Pomfret had a hard struggle for life, and for several days even the surgeon despaired of his recovery.

During the access of the fever which came on, he talked so wildly, that Sophy, fearing he might betray himself, remained constantly with him, hovering about his couch like a ministering angel. She soothed him by all means in her power during his delirium, and though he could give no distinct expression to his thoughts, he seemed to be conscious of her presence.

So far as Sophy could gather, various scenes of his troubled existence passed confusedly before him, but his disordered brain could not fix them. Her own name was constantly on his lips. Sometimes he spoke of her with passionate tenderness,

that recalled their brief season of happiness, and touched her to the heart. Sometimes he spoke of her with a fierceness of indignation that showed how terribly his feelings had been outraged. At other times he mourned her as dead.

It is almost needless to say how acutely Sophy suffered while listening to these ravings. They convinced her of his undying love, but the conviction only sharpened her anguish.

As the fever abated, apprehensions of a different kind began to assail Sophy. What would he say when he recognised her? Should she leave him? No, she could not abandon her post now. Be the consequences what they might, she would remain near him.

After several nights and days of restlessness, during which his brain had been in a ceaseless turmoil, he enjoyed a few hours of placid slumber, and when he awoke, his eyes rested upon the

gentle watcher near his couch. She neither spoke nor stirred, and he gazed at her long and earnestly, as if he beheld a vision which he thought would disappear. At last, he murmured her name, but not in accents of displeasure, and she rose and went nearer to him.

"Yes, I am here," she said. "Can I give you anything?"

"Where am I?" he inquired, trying to regain his faculties. "What has happened?"

"You have been ill — very ill," she replied. "But all danger is now over."

"Raise me a little," he said.

But as she endeavoured to obey him, the pain caused by the movement was so great that he sank back with a groan.

"You have had a severe accident—a fall from a horse," she remarked, in answer to his inquiring looks.

"How long ago?" he asked. "I can recollect nothing about it. Where am I?"

She answered his questions briefly, and then, motioning him to be silent, sat down again.

IV.

PROGRESS TOWARDS RECOVERY.

In obedience to Sophy's injunctions, Pomfret remained for some time silent. He then made an effort to raise himself, and fixed his eyes inquiringly upon her.

"I now remember what brought me here," he said. "You had sent for me. You had some communication to make to me. What is it?"

"Do not trouble yourself about me," she replied. "Let your first thoughts be directed to Heaven, for the merciful preservation of your life."

"It might have been a greater mercy if Heaven had taken me," he rejoined. "I have no desire to live."

"Oh, say not so!" she cried. "Much happiness may yet be in store for you. Brighter days, I cannot doubt, will soon dawn upon you. Can you forgive me for causing you this accident? It was in compliance with my request that you came here—to meet this dreadful disaster, which might have proved fatal."

"I have nothing to forgive you," he replied. "On the contrary, I ought to feel deep gratitude, since no doubt I owe my life to your watchfulness. I now begin to comprehend who it is that has been constantly near my couch. But tell me," he added, after a pause, "why you sent for me? What are your plans? Do not fear agitating me. I shall suffer more from my own thoughts than from anything you can say."

"I have no plans," she replied. "All my notions have been scattered by the accident that has befallen you, and I have not yet been able to collect them again."

"But in your note to Eva you said you had an important communication to make to me. What is it?"

"I would rather defer the explanation till you are better able to listen to it. I may be the means of causing you further mischief."

"Speak! You will do me no harm."

"I shall stop instantly, if I perceive any excitement. My object in sending for you was to consult you before taking another decisive step. But my position is now worse than it was, and explanation to Mrs. Carew is unavoidable. When you were brought into the house, dangerously injured, I quite lost my presence of mind, and gave utterance to expressions that betrayed the

state of my feelings in regard to you. Mrs. Carew believes you to be my husband—she supposes we have been separated — but she is utterly unacquainted with my real history. She must now know all. She must know exactly how I am circumstanced."

"Tell her all. I authorise you to do so."

"Oh! thank you for the permission. However she may act in regard to me, you may be sure she will keep your secret inviolate. It may be, when she learns how I am situated, that she will no longer think it right to offer me an asylum. In that case I must go."

"Do not take any step till I am able to counsel you and assist you. As yet, I do not feel equal to the effort. But you have not spoken to me of Eva. Has she been here?"

"No. I have written to her fully. She knows who I am."

He alarmed her, and she again enjoined silence.

He had just got composed when the door was gently opened, and the surgeon came in, followed by Mrs. Carew. As Mr. Southwood approached the bed, Sophy whispered to him,

"He is better—much better."

The surgeon proceeded to feel the patient's pulse.

"Yes, a great improvement has taken place since yesterday," he said. "The fever is quite gone. You will do now, my dear sir," he added, in a cheerful voice to Pomfret. "You will soon be out of my hands."

Mrs. Carew, who was standing near, uttered an exclamation of satisfaction which attracted the patient's attention.

"Is not that Mrs. Carew?" he inquired.

Mr. Southwood replied in the affirmative, adding, in a low voice,

"The good lady has been unremitting in her attentions to you since your accident."

"I am quite aware of it," replied Pomfret. "Pray accept my heartfelt thanks for the extraordinary kindness you have shown me, madam," he added to her—"kindness which I shall never forget."

"Your gratitude is not due to me," she rejoined, "but to the lady who has nursed you. If any one has preserved your life, it is Mrs. Montfort."

"Yes, I don't know what we should have done without her," observed the surgeon. "Mrs. Montfort has been a most excellent nurse."

"Say no more, if you please, sir," interposed Sophy. "Mr. Pomfret has already expressed his gratitude to me."

Pomfret again addressed himself to Mrs. Carew.

"If you decline to accept my thanks, madam,"

he said, "you must allow me, at least, to express my concern for the inconvenience to which I have put you. A wounded man is a great trouble in a house."

"You have been no trouble to me, I can assure you, sir," she replied. "My only anxiety has been for your recovery. You must not think of leaving me till you are quite well."

"What do you say, sir?" inquired Pomfret of the surgeon. "I fancy I am strong enough to be moved to Hylton Castle to-day."

Mr. Southwood shook his head.

"You are not so strong as you imagine, my dear sir," he replied. "I hope shortly to authorise your removal. Meantime, you must keep quiet. You cannot be better off than here."

Signing to the ladies to follow him, he then left the room.

Mr. Pomfret has talked rather too much, and

is somewhat over-excited," he observed to Sophy, as they gained the passage. "He will be best left alone awhile."

"Is there still any danger?" she inquired, anxiously.

"None whatever. He is doing as well as possible. In a few days I shall be able to send him home perfectly cured."

From that day Pomfret gradually but slowly mended. His recovery would have been more rapid, but he missed Sophy's attendance at his couch. She came near him no more.

He learnt from old Nathan, the butler, who supplied her place, that she was not well, and confined to her room.

He did not even see Mrs. Carew, and this circumstance added to his uneasiness.

V.

SIR NORMAN AGAIN APPEARS ON THE SCENE.

THE groom, who brought intelligence of the accident to Hylton Castle, said that he believed his master was killed, or, at all events, so severely injured that he could not survive many hours.

On receiving this alarming news, Eva fainted away, and continued in such a nervous excitable state for some time afterwards, that neither her aunt nor Mrs. Austin liked to leave her for a moment.

Very little improvement took place in her con-

dition until Mr. Southwood himself came to inform her that the dangerous crisis was past, and that Mr. Pomfret would recover. Her nervous excitement then subsided. The surgeon had assured her that his patient was most carefully nursed by Mrs. Montfort, and was doing as well as could be expected. Though rejoicing that her guardian was so well tended, Eva could not repress a slight feeling of jealousy that another should occupy the place which she would have given worlds to fill.

A long explanatory letter, which she subsequently received from Sophy, caused a complete revulsion of feeling, and satisfied her that her guardian ought to be left entirely to the care of that devoted lady.

Thenceforward she was content with the surgeon's daily report, and with the frequent messages which she received from Mrs. Carew.

During this trying time, her walks were re-

stricted in the park, which was now in its full autumnal beauty. Beneath the gigantic chesnuts the yellow leaves lay thick, and the long glades were carpeted in like manner. The red leaves of the beeches contrasted with the embrowned tints of the oaks, the bright gold of the chesnuts, and the paler yellow of the limes. Fresh contrasts were offered between the russet hue of the fern clothing the sides of the hill and the lively green of gorse. Perhaps the avenue had been robbed of some of its beauty by the loss of a portion of its delicate foliage, but if the leaves were gone, the exquisite tracery of the overarching branches was fully displayed.

One morning, after a lengthened stroll in the park, Eva and her aunt were returning homewards through the avenue, when a sound arrested their attention, and looking back, they descried a horseman riding in the direction of the mansion. On

seeing them he quickened his pace, and Eva soon perceived, to her great surprise, that it was Sir Norman Hylton.

In another moment the young baronet came up. Instantly dismounting, he explained to Eva that he was staying in the neighbourhood with his friend Lord Huntercombe, and having accidentally learnt that very morning, to his great regret, that Mr. Myddleton Pomfret had met with a serious accident, he had ridden over to inquire after him.

Eva was able to give him the very satisfactory assurance that his friend was recovering rapidly—indeed, was almost well.

She then introduced him to her aunt, and felt constrained to invite him to enter the house.

The party then moved on in that direction, Sir Norman leading his horse, and conversing with Eva as he walked by her side.

"I hear you have done a great deal to the old

place," he remarked, "and I am sure much was needed to render it habitable. There was a sort of understanding that I should not come here during your stay, but my anxiety about Pomfret must plead my excuse for breaking the compact. If I had not chanced upon you, I should merely have made inquiries at the door."

"Your old housekeeper would never have forgiven my niece if you had done so, Sir Norman," observed Mrs. Daventry. "She is constantly wishing you could see the place."

"I hope you like it," he rejoined, smiling. "I am very proud of this avenue. I believe it to be the finest in England. But all the timber in the park looks to advantage just now, with the autumn tints upon the leaves. Don't you think so?"

"I am enchanted both with the park and the castle," replied Eva. "I was perfectly happy here till this disaster befel my guardian."

"Mr. Pomfret's accident was a great shock to my niece, Sir Norman," remarked Mrs. Daventry.

"It must have been," he rejoined. "Miss Bracebridge is not looking quite so blooming as when I last saw her in Switzerland. But the roses will soon return, I make no doubt."

They seemed to return at once, for Eva's pale cheek flushed at the observation.

They were now approaching the mansion, and as Sir Norman gazed around, he acknowledged that a wonderful improvement had been made in the place. Perceiving a man at work in the garden, he gave his horse to him, and entered the house with the ladies.

VI.

MRS. AUSTIN'S ADVICE TO HER YOUNG MASTER.

GREAT was Mrs. Austin's delight on beholding her young master, and he appeared equally well pleased to see the good old dame, and shook hands with her very cordially. Eva then desired the old housekeeper to take Sir Norman over the house, adding, that by the time he had completed the survey, luncheon would be served.

Needless to say that the young baronet would much rather have stayed with Eva. However, he resigned himself to the old housekeeper, and commenced an inspection of the place.

While looking over one of the lower rooms, and showing him what had been done, Mrs. Austin, who had been accustomed to make free with him when he was younger, began to descant on Eva's amiability and beauty, and found the young baronet a very willing listener.

"Ah! Sir Norman, I wish you would cast your eyes in this direction," she cried. "Miss Bracebridge has everything to recommend her. Of her beauty I need say nothing, and she must be rich, for you see what an establishment she keeps up. I say *she* keeps up, for Mr. Pomfret takes good care to let the servants understand that she is their mistress. Now, Sir Norman, with all these recommendations, don't you think she would suit you?"

"Most certainly she would, Austin," he replied, with a forced laugh. "Unluckily, her affections are otherwise engaged."

"I think you must be mistaken. Ever since she

has been here I have not seen a single suitor, or heard of one; nor has her maid Susan—and we've had a little confidential chat on the subject."

"And you have both come to the conclusion that Miss Bracebridge has no attachment, eh?"

"Well, I can't say that exactly, Sir Norman. Susan will have it that the young lady is in love with her guardian, but I'm sure she's wrong."

"Susan is more quick-sighted than you, Austin," said Sir Norman, gravely. "Sit down for a moment," he added, flinging himself into a chair. "I want to have a little confidential chat with you, myself. So Susan thinks Miss Bracebridge is in love with her guardian, eh?"

"I can't see it, Sir Norman," rejoined the housekeeper, taking a seat as requested. "But if it is so—as I very much doubt—her affection is not reciprocated. Mr. Pomfret is a very handsome gentleman, and likely enough to win a young

lady's affections if he were inclined, but his manner towards his ward is quite that of a father. Susan herself has made the same remark. You needn't fear him. He has no idea of marrying his ward. He is very seldom here, and leaves the management of the house entirely to Miss Bracebridge and to me."

"She must have been greatly shocked by the accident that has befallen him?" remarked Sir Norman. "She still looks ill."

"Yes, we heard that the poor gentleman was so dangerously hurt that he couldn't survive, and the shock was too much for her. Poor dear young lady! she took on sadly. If her guardian had been really killed, I believe she would have died."

"What does that prove, Austin?"

"That she loves him like a daughter."

"Not exactly. Has she seen him since the accident?"

"No. Circumstances have prevented her. She prefers keeping away from the house."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Sir Norman, surprised. "Why?"

"I can't tell you," she replied. Though she looked as if she could.

He then desired her to give him full particulars of the accident, and listened to what she told him with deep interest. He was well acquainted with Mrs. Carew, but had never heard of Mrs. Montfort. The old housekeeper, however, could give him no information respecting the latter.

The questions he asked about Eva, combined with his manner, convinced Mrs. Austin that he was greatly interested in the young lady.

"I am quite sure you need not despair of winning Miss Bracebridge's hand, Sir Norman," she said.

"Shall I let you into a secret, Austin?" he

rejoined. "I know I can trust you. I have been refused already. And the cause of my refusal, I ascertained, beyond a doubt, was that Miss Bracebridge is attached to her guardian."

"When did this occur, Sir Norman, may I venture to ask?" she inquired.

"When I was in Switzerland—only six weeks ago," he replied. "So you see my case is hopeless."

"I don't think so," she returned. "I advise you to renew your suit. You have a much better chance now. Possibly, Miss Bracebridge may have been secretly attached to her guardian at that time. I won't pretend to say. But of this I am certain, she had no encouragement from him. He is far too honourable to have deceived her."

"What on earth do you mean, Austin?"

"I can't explain myself more clearly. Whatever Miss Bracebridge's sentiments towards her

guardian may have been at that time, they have changed since."

"Are you quite certain of what you state?"

"Quite certain. Since Mr. Pomfret's accident she has made a discovery that must have completely extinguished any foolish notions she may have entertained. I call them 'foolish notions,' because, as I have just said, she could never have had the slightest encouragement from Mr. Pomfret. You must not ask me to give you any further explanation. But circumstances have come to my knowledge that enable me to declare positively that Miss Bracebridge can never think of Mr. Pomfret as a husband. If your supposition, therefore, is correct, and he is the person who stood in your way, you need have no fear."

"You amaze me!" cried Sir Norman, unable to conceal his satisfaction. "I fancy I understand the discovery that Eva has made. No doubt her

sentiments have undergone a complete change. You have indeed revived my hopes."

"You must act with caution, and on no account allow Miss Bracebridge to suspect that you have obtained any information from me. I am betraying no confidence, but still——"

"Fear no imprudence on my part, Austin," he interrupted, joyfully. "When I came here I had not a hope, but I now feel sanguine of success. You can serve me most materially in the matter."

"You know that you can calculate on me, Sir Norman; and I hope I may be instrumental in obtaining you a charming wife. You have certainly come at the right moment."

"Yes, I begin to think that this time fate will befriend me," he cried.

Here their conference was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who came to inform Sir Norman that luncheon was served.

The young baronet immediately arose, and with a significant look at Mrs. Austin proceeded to the dining-room, where he found Eva and her aunt.

VII.

MRS. DAVENTRY'S ADVICE TO HER NIECE.

WHILE Sir Norman was occupied with the old housekeeper, as described in the foregoing chapter, Mrs. Daventry was sounding his praises to her niece.

"I was not prepared to find him so agreeable as he turns out," remarked the elder lady. "As I looked at him just now, when he joined us in the avenue, and thought of his gallant conduct in your behalf, I could not help wondering how you could possibly have refused so very handsome a man."

"I refused him simply because I did not like him well enough to accept him, aunt. I admit that he is very handsome, remarkably well bred, spirited, agreeable—even clever—but I can never think of him as a husband."

"Well, my dear, I can only express my surprise. But perhaps you may now change your mind. Unless I am very much mistaken, he still cherishes a regard for you."

"If I thought so, aunt, I would not see him again, but leave you to entertain him at luncheon. There is no likelihood whatever that my sentiments towards him will undergo a change, and that he perfectly understands."

"But it is impossible you can dislike him, my love."

"I don't say that I dislike him, aunt. I am simply indifferent to him. But please don't tease me any more about him, or I shall positively carry out my threat, and not appear at luncheon."

"You will never do so rude a thing as that, my dear. If Sir Norman has not been able entirely to conquer his passion for you, as I think is pretty evident, you ought to feel pity for him, not anger."

"He has no business to come here at all," said Eva, affecting a displeasure which she really did not feel. "He has done so contrary to his promise made at the Beau-Rivage, when he distinctly said that he wouldn't come near the house while we occupied it, unless invited. He knew very well that he would never be invited."

"He came to inquire after Mr. Pomfret, my love, and for no other reason, as he expressly stated. I am convinced there was no design of intrusion on his part. The tell-tale blood mounted to his cheek and proclaimed the state of his heart when he first spoke to you, but I am sure he did not utter a word of which you can justly complain.

Really, he is such a charming man, that I wish I could prevail upon you to look upon him more kindly."

"My dear aunt, you are more pertinacious than Mr. Pomfret, who pleaded Sir Norman's cause so warmly."

"Did Mr. Pomfret plead his cause?" inquired Mrs. Daventry, rather surprised.

"To be sure. I thought you understood that. Mr. Pomfret was most anxious to make up the match. He gave me no peace during the whole time we were at the Beau-Rivage, but was perpetually dinning Sir Norman's praises into my ear."

"And why didn't you listen to what your guardian said, my love? He gave you excellent advice. Any one having your welfare really at heart would have given you similar counsel. Now that I have seen Sir Norman, I think it a thousand

pities you should have rejected him. But it is not too late to retrieve the error. Very little encouragement on your part will bring him round again."

Eva shook her head, as much as to say she couldn't do it.

"Can you find any fault with him?" pursued Mrs. Daventry. "Is he not young, spirited, handsome, distinguished-looking? Is he not of a good old family? Has he not a title? Is he not owner of the very mansion in which you are residing, and which you like so much? Do not the noble domains which we view from these windows belong to him? In a word, has he not a hundred recommendations, and not a single drawback, that I can perceive?"

"All this is very true, aunt. Sir Norman is unexceptionable. But I don't care for him."

"But you *will* care for him. Give him a chance

of winning your affections. But if you behave coldly to him now, you will chill him effectually, and he may retire altogether."

"I hope he has retired, aunt."

"Now, be a good girl, and do as I tell you. You may have had reasons for your former refusal of him, which don't exist now."

"What do you mean, aunt?" cried Eva, turning crimson.

"Nay, I really meant nothing particular, my dear. I want you to consider well before you entirely throw away this charming young baronet. I should dearly like to see you Lady Hylton."

VIII.

REVIVAL OF THE FLAME.

It was quite evident, from the young baronet's manner during luncheon, that the fire which had been smouldering in his bosom was called into fresh activity.

Without loss of time, and to the great delight of Mrs. Daventry, who proved a most useful auxiliary, he began to lay siege to Eva. Though twice repulsed before, and with serious loss, he thought—now that the most important obstacle was removed—that he should succeed in storming

the citadel. It was impossible, however, as he soon discovered, to take it by a coup de main.

Whether Eva was really influenced by her aunt's counsel while feigning not to heed it, or whether Sir Norman had at last seized a more favourable moment than had hitherto been presented to him, he certainly did not meet with a decided rebuff. The young lady listened to him with more interest than she had ever previously manifested, and whenever a word could be advantageously thrown in, Mrs. Daventry supplied it. The enamoured young baronet took care to make the idol of his affections understand that she had been the cause of bringing him back to England.

"When you left the Beau-Rivage," he said, "the place appeared so dull that I could not remain there. So, as soon as I was able to travel, I moved off to Paris. There I found lots of acquaintances, and all sorts of distraction, and

tried desperately hard to conquer the ennui that had taken possession of me, but in vain. I got tired of the boulevards, tired of the Bois, tired of the cafés, tired of the theatres, tired of my friends, tired of myself."

"You must have been in a desperate plight, Sir Norman," remarked Mrs. Daventry. "I wonder you are here to tell the tale."

"Yes, it is a marvel that I was not found in the Morgue. I had serious thoughts of throwing myself into the Seine. Finding Paris do me no good—indeed it made me worse, for such noisy gaiety was intolerable in my then frame of mind —I considered where I should go next: to Vienna, St. Petersburg, Madrid, or Seville? Unable to decide, in a fit of despair I hurried off to London."

"A change for the better, I hope?" remarked Mrs. Daventry.

"I didn't find it so, and was just on the point

of starting for Scotland, when I got a letter from Huntercombe, asking me to come down to his place for a week's shooting. For certain reasons, this suited me better than Scotland, and I accepted the invitation. I found the house full of company. Huntercombe's preserves are famously stocked, he is a delightful host, and Lady Huntercombe—who, by-the-by, is a near relative of my own—is a charming person, lively, spiritual, witty. You ought to know her, Miss Bracebridge. She would be enchanted to make your acquaintance. Well, with good shooting, with an agreeable host and hostess, with so many pleasant people about me, so many pretty girls to flirt with, if I wanted to flirt, I ought to have regained my spirits, but I didn't. Just as melancholy as ever. Nothing amused me. Huntercombe noticed my gloom, and rallied me unmercifully upon it, and her ladyship said I must be suffering from a heart complaint.

I had unmistakable symptoms, she declared, of a very severe attack."

"Well, if her ladyship's opinion of the case is correct, and I suppose it must be," remarked Mrs. Daventry, "it is to be hoped that the malady won't terminate fatally."

"Little fear of that, aunt," observed Eva. "Sir Norman gives a very deplorable account of himself, but his looks scarcely bear out his statement."

"I mustn't be judged by my present appearance," he said. "Had you seen me at breakfast, you would have commiserated me. I had no end of sympathy from the young ladies present, expressed in the most flattering terms."

"I can scarcely add my sympathy to theirs," rejoined Eva. "You seem to have recovered very quickly."

"No wonder. I have at last found a specific for my malady."

Mrs. Daventry smiled, but Eva affected not to understand him.

"I see you don't believe that I have been so wretched as I have stated," he continued. "On my honour, for the last six weeks—ever since you quitted the Beau-Rivage, in fact—life has been a burden to me. As I have told you, I could not amuse myself either in Paris or London. Nothing interested me or excited me. Till I came here to-day I was a prey to despair. I am better now; and shall get quite well, if I don't have a relapse."

"I trust you are in no danger of that, Sir Norman," remarked Mrs. Daventry, with a smile. "Since this visit to Hylton Castle has been of service to you, I hope you will ride over frequently while you are in the neighbourhood. We shall always be delighted to see you."

"May I come?" said Sir Norman, with a supplicating look at Eva.

"Certainly, if it will do you good," she replied. "My aunt will always be glad to see you, and I hope poor Mr. Pomfret will be back in a few days."

"Then you still think my illness imaginary? I would rather have had poor Pomfret's accident than suffer as I have done. How fortunate he was to find so excellent a nurse! Pray, who is Mrs. Montfort, who has devoted herself so much to him?"

Perceptibly embarrassed by the question, Eva merely replied,

"A very amiable lady, who is residing with Mrs. Carew."

"Very interesting — young, and extremely pretty," added Mrs. Daventry.

"A young widow, I suppose?" inquired Sir Norman.

"I can't say," replied Mrs. Daventry. "I have

only just seen her when we have called on Mrs. Carew. But I was greatly struck by her appearance."

"Mrs. Montfort has had many misfortunes," said Eva. "She is in a position of most painful perplexity, and it seems as if ill luck constantly attended her. Mr. Pomfret rode over one morning to offer her aid and advice, and met with this dreadful accident."

"That is strange indeed," remarked Sir Norman, gravely. "From what you say, a fatality seems to attend the poor lady. It is evident that you take a strong interest in her. Can I be of any service to her?"

Eva shook her head.

"She had found a home with Mrs. Carew," she said; "but I fear she will be obliged to leave it."

"How so?" inquired Sir Norman. But he

checked himself, and added, "Excuse me. Don't answer the question, unless you like."

"You may be quite sure that Mrs. Montfort has good reasons for leaving so kind a friend as Mrs. Carew," said Eva. "But though I know her motives for the step, I cannot explain them."

There was a slight pause. In order to change the subject, Sir Norman said:

"Does Pomfret still adhere to his design of returning to Madras?"

"I cannot say. He has postponed his departure from time to time. And now, perhaps, he may postpone it altogether."

"Well, you will be glad of that?"

"I shall be very sorry, of course, to lose him; still, I think he ought to go. He has important affairs to attend to there."

"Aha! here's a change indeed!" thought Sir

Norman. "Mrs. Austin was quite right.—Do you still wish to go back wth him?" he asked.

"No. I have changed my mind. I no longer desire to revisit India. Mr. Pomfret dissuaded me from accompanying him, and now I wouldn't go if he would let me."

"Well, I think you are quite right. But may I venture to ask what has caused this change of opinion?"

"I don't know what has caused it. But I certainly shall not return to Madras with Mr. Pomfret."

"Come!" thought Sir Norman. "That's decisive. Well, I hope he won't start for a month or so," he added, aloud. "I have some arrangements to make with him."

"About this house?" she inquired.

"Partly," he rejoined, with a certain significance that did not escape Mrs. Daventry. "But

let me say at once," he hastened to add, "if you have the slightest desire to prolong your stay beyond Christmas, the place shall be at your disposal."

"You are excessively kind. But I may be keeping you out of the house. What will you do?"

"Oh! never mind me," he rejoined. "You must let me come and see the place occasionally —that's all."

Mrs. Daventry smiled, and her countenance wore an expression that implied a good deal, though she made no remark.

"I shall hear what Mr. Pomfret has to say when he comes back," observed Eva. "I must be guided by him."

"If you desire to stay," said Sir Norman, looking fixedly at her, "I don't think there will be any difficulty on your guardian's part, and certainly none on mine."

Eva cast down her eyes, and made no reply to this remarkably gallant speech.

Matters seemed to be going on so well, that Mrs. Daventry thought it best not to interfere.

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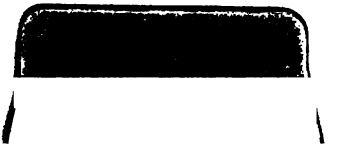
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